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THE INTEGRATION OF PLAY INTO THE FIRST-GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS
CURRICULUM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	12
First Language Development	13
Second Language Learning	14
Play.....	17
Development of Play.....	18
Learning Through Play.....	20
Literacy Development.....	23
Considering the Developing Child When Designing Curriculum.....	25
Curriculum Design.....	26
Chapter 3	28
Curriculum Design.....	28
Setting and School Population.....	28
Caseload Demographics.....	28
General Academic Difficulties.....	29
Elements of the Curriculum.....	29
Course Outcomes.....	30
Chapter Summary.....	30

Chapter 4	31
Stage 1-Identify Desired Results for the Entire Unit.....	31
Stage 2-Determine Acceptable Evidence.....	32
Stage 3-Plan the Learning Experiences.....	33
What the Curriculum Looks Like.....	33
Vocabulary Lesson.....	33
Matching Game.....	36
Read the Story to the Students.....	37
Play the Game.....	42
Play.....	48
Oral Summary of the Story.....	48
Summary with Sentence Frames.....	48
Reading the Story.....	49
Chapter 5	50
Conclusion.....	50
Reflection on My Learning and Writing.....	51
Designing the Curriculum.....	54

Plan for Implementation.....	55
Chapter Summary.....	56
References.....	58

CHAPTER 1

Could the integration of games and play into the first grade Language Arts curriculum make a difference in helping English learners (EL) increase oral language fluency with the possible potential of increasing literacy skills? After a couple of weeks of school this fall, a school district in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota tested all of the first graders in their reading skills. Five students who are ELL did not have very good results. To begin with, they could not segment words. Then when told a word, they could not come up with a rhyming word. When shown the letters of the alphabet, they could name most of the letters but they did not know what sounds the letters made. How could this possibly be? All of these children went through kindergarten at our school. All three of our teachers did an excellent job teaching reading readiness skills. Every day these students spent 30 minutes with me where we worked on learning to communicate in English. What went wrong?

It has become apparent to me, an EL teacher of students Kindergarten through fifth grade, I need to work on two things at the same time with EL children. They need to increase their oral English vocabulary as well as develop their ability to read. How can I accomplish these two things at the same time? Should the first grade Language Arts curriculum be expanded to include more oral language activities? Would the integration of play have any effect on learning a new language? Could play strengthen their English language skills as well as their ability to learn to read? One might think, “When there are

only 30 minutes a day to help children improve their language and literacy skills, wouldn't having the students engaging in play be a waste of valuable time?"

While I was an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, one of my required courses was language development taught by Dr. Carol Prutting. I greatly disliked this class. Unfortunately, what I usually focused on was the person lecturing and not on what she was trying to convey. She was a short, rotund woman with wavy, disheveled, dishwater-blond hair. She always wore colorful, billowy, cotton gauze skirts with a loose-fitting, peasant style blouse. After she walked into the room and before she began her lecture for the day, she never erased the chalkboard. (Yes, we still had chalkboards when I attended college!) Needless to say, it was always covered with writing from the previous professor's lecture. Then, when she began her lecture, she would look for any tiny bit of empty space on the board where she would insert her lecture notes. I would have to write them down quickly because, invariably, as she walked back and forth in front of the board, her skirt would erase parts of her lecture. Then, if she needed a little bit of extra space for her notes, she would use her hands to clear off a bit of the board. By the time class was over, she would have chalk all over her hands and her clothing. At the time, I just thought she was eccentric. I never took her or her lectures very seriously. However, for some reason, what I have always remembered were her discussions on the development of play in relationship to the development of language. She maintained that play could be utilized to influence language growth. I do not remember any of the details but her premise always puzzled yet interested me. What

does play have to do with language? Then I got to thinking. Why did this bother me to the point of remembering it from when I was in college?

I began to think of my own family history of language acquisition. Both of my mother's parents had a first language other than English. My grandmother's first language was Ojibway. She was raised in Ponema, on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota. When she grew up, that little community was still very isolated from mainstream America. There was neither indoor plumbing nor electricity and few people owned an automobile. Like the adults, children always had a lot of work to do. The type of language that adults used when communicating with their children was very directive in nature. They were told what to do and how to do it or else they were scolded for doing something incorrectly. If children were quiet, they might be allowed to listen to adults conversing with each other. Since that was usually boring, the children usually played outside with each other. The language used then would have been kid language. Since the adults had too much work to do, they did not play with their children which would have modeled more adult language.

When my grandmother was 6 years old, her dad put her, along with her older brother and sister, in a wagon which was pulled by a team of horses so that they could go on a two-day camping trip. Unbeknownst to her, the destination was a Catholic boarding school, still on the reservation but in a different town. It was two days before they arrived at their destination. He walked her and her siblings into the school and chatted with the nuns for a bit. He then told her to turn around so that he could fix her braids. While she

was not looking he walked out the door. She heard the door slam. He got into the wagon. He turned the horses around. He went home. She turned around to see her father leave. She fought against the nuns who were restraining her from leaving. In her struggle to be free, she grabbed a nun's rosary, breaking it, sending the beads everywhere. She cried for three days but finally adjusted to the fact that she had to live at the mission without her parents. She was now to learn from the nuns at the school. In this school, play was not a part of learning English or learning how to read. They learned English by being forbidden to ever speak Ojibway. Even while outside running around with the other girls, English was the only language ever allowed. The children were punished if they broke this rule.

My grandmother went to this school until the end of eight grade. That was when she went back to Ponema to live with her mother because her father died. Her older brother and sister actually went on to college for a time but she said that she had to live at home to help her mother. I know that Grandma could read and write in English because I have read the letters that she wrote to my mother. The letters were in very neat handwriting and were written without any spelling or grammatical errors. If, as Dr. Prutting taught us, play is such an integral part of learning language, how was she able to learn to communicate in two languages and also read in English? It was through intimidation, punishment and total immersion in English.

My mom's grandparents on her father's side emigrated from Bohemia to New York. Bohemia, in central Europe, was part of Czechoslovakia, now of the Czech

Republic. Some-time after my grandfather was born, a large group of Bohemians, including my great-grandparents, moved to northern Minnesota between Waskish and Baudette on the northern shore of Red Lake where they became homesteaders. Since my grandfather was a quiet man, he did not tell us about any of his childhood experiences. I do know, however, that creating a new life was very hard for anyone trying to live on that very swampy land. My great-grandmother told my dad about the summer time when the flies and mosquitoes were so bad that she and her children had to spend the days under a sheet. The buzzing was so loud and incessant that it almost drove them crazy.

The people who moved there became farmers. The majority of the land they lived on was muskeg, which is basically a swamp formed from thick growing sphagnum moss and decaying organic material. When one walks through a muskeg, usually to pick wild blueberries and cranberries, the ground bounces because it floats on water. Before they could plant a single seed, the land had to be drained and cleared. They drained it by digging ditches by hand so that the water would flow into Red Lake. Once the water was drained they would cut down the trees and with the help of a horse, pull out the stumps. They would then burn off the remaining debris. There was not any time for play by either men or women. The children too were expected to do their share of the work.

My grandfather was completely bilingual. I do not know where or how he learned English but he had an excellent speaking ability in both languages. He also learned to read and write the Czech language which utilizes a different alphabet and writing system than English. He used to write letters to his Bohemian relatives and also read Czech

newspapers. How did he learn English? I do not know. He was a very quiet man and did not talk to me very often.

A few years ago I was talking to my uncle (my mother's sister's husband). I was greatly surprised to learn that German had been his first language. He did not learn English until he went to school in 1938. He did not mention what his school days were like. However, he said that his brother often came home with red marks all over his arms. At first I thought that maybe it was from markers but that did not make any sense. When I pressed him on what caused the red marks, he informed me that every time his brother spoke German, the teacher would pinch his arms. English was the only language allowed while in school. How did he learn English? It was through intimidation, punishment and total immersion in English.

After ruminating upon my family's experiences regarding acquiring English language and literacy, I can now understand why I viewed Dr. Carol Prutting's lectures on play and language development with so much cynicism. The relatives that I mentioned grew up in an extremely harsh environment. They learned to speak, read and write in their second language through punishment, intimidation, and complete immersion. While this may be a successful model for some, certainly it is not the only way to learn. It is not how I want to interact with my students while trying to teach them English. When I realized that there might be a better way, I began to wonder if Dr. Prutting might be right. Maybe play can be utilized to stimulate the language-acquisition and literacy of my first grade, English language learners.

Since I was young and inexperienced, I did not fully understand all that Dr. Prutting was trying to teach. Now that I am an experienced teacher, my thoughts go back to her teachings and writings. I will be actively exploring if play and games can influence the development of language and literacy, specifically in first-grade children learning English as a second language.

CHAPTER 2

How to help first grade, English second language learners learn oral language and literacy skills through play and games.

Introduction

In chapter one, I wrote about how members of my family were forced to learn English, their second language, through intimidation, punishment, and total immersion while they were in school. As an English teacher of first grade students, I am very interested in finding a better way to help my students acquire English as their second language. I would like to explore ways to integrate play into their Language Arts curriculum. The following research will explore first and second language development, literacy development, play development and curriculum development. I believe the understanding of all of these components will help me to design a high quality curriculum for my students.

Vigotsky (1986) said that the development of a second language is based upon the foundation of the first language. Therefore, I will do a study of first language development so I can be confident about what the student already knows. Next will be a study of how a child learns a second language which will include vocabulary development. Since I would like to develop oral English and teach reading in English at the same time, I will include literacy development. Since play is the element that I will utilize to integrate second-language learning with other elements of the curriculum, I will define play, discuss the development of play and games with rules, and explore how a child learns through play.

Lastly, I will research developmentally appropriate practices for first-graders and investigate the backward design model of curriculum design.

First Language Development

By the age of six months, a child is babbling, making language-like sounds. From eleven to sixteen months, children begin speaking single words. Those words refer to objects, commands, and social functions such as greetings. The meaning of single words will be extended to mean a variety of items. Around age two, children begin to make word combinations.

At the two to seven-year-old level, children imitate the people in their environment. They are not consciously aware of this behavior. They do not differentiate between the people they are imitating and their own self doing the imitating. This stage of imitating is of a broad nature. (Piaget, 1962).

I remember when my youngest daughter was around two and a half. While I was having a conversation with another adult, she used to imitate our body language and would repeat some of the words we were saying. At the time, we adults would laugh because her behavior was so entertaining. We thought she was clowning around, trying to make us laugh. I realize now that this form of imitation was a natural stage in her development of language.

My six and seven year old students should have developed the ability to imitate adults in their first language. Therefore, as they develop their second language, the

students should be able to imitate me as I model their new language. I will now look at how I can teach these children a second language.

Second Language Learning

Since I work with students whose first language is not English, it is important to understand the major theories behind learning another language. Stephen Krashen (2003), a leader in this field for over thirty years, offers five main hypotheses.

The **Monitor Hypothesis** explains how a person monitors his/her speech to make it sound more native-like. The consciously learned system of language is used to monitor or edit the subconsciously acquired language. To utilize the Monitor the speaker needs to know the grammatical rules of the second language. When the rules are known, a person can pre-think what needs to be spoken to produce correct sentences. First-grade children will not know the grammatical rules of English. Since these young children are learning their language through imitation, utilizing the Monitor hypothesis will not be very fruitful for helping my students acquire another language.

The **Acquisition-Learner Hypothesis** represents the two separate systems of second language performance. *Acquisition* requires meaningful interaction through natural communication. This is similar to how a person learns a first language. This type of learning is a subconscious process. The integration of play into the learning of a language could produce a very natural setting for communication and acquisition. *Learning* comes from being formally taught about a language such as from grammar instruction. This is a conscious process which involves learning the grammar of a language. As

mentioned in the previous hypothesis, the learning aspect of this theory will not be very helpful with first-grade students because they are still in the imitative stage.

The **Natural Order Hypothesis** suggests that there is a predictable order for acquiring grammar which applies to both first and second language acquisition. Those learning English as their second language acquire the grammar for *yes-no* questions before the grammar of *wh-* questions. This natural order cannot be deliberately changed, even with extensive teaching. Grammar will be acquired sequentially and when the student is ready.

The **Input (Comprehension) Hypothesis** explains acquisition. This hypothesis presumes that communication should be conducted naturally. Lessons should be designed with the student in mind, plus one step beyond his/her current stage of independent language competence. What is important is that students receive messages that they can comprehend and that they will pay attention to. If the messages are interesting, students will pay attention to them. During the interaction of play, the students will be paying attention to each other because the activity will be fun. If a teacher is directing the activity, vocabulary can be introduced that the students do not yet understand. With the presence of objects (often called “realia”) the vocabulary could be readily learned. This hypothesis holds great promise as I explore ways to help my first-grade students acquire a second language.

Lev Vygotsky (1986) would term this hypothesis the zone of proximal development. This zone is the level where one could comprehend if assistance is provided. The size of

the zone varies from person to person or stage of knowledge. Once the zone is exceeded, it does not matter how much assistance is given. The student will no longer be successful. His or her maturity level will have been exceeded.

The last hypothesis I will mention from Krashen (2003) is the **Affective Filter**. This hypothesis involves variables that play a role in language learning. They are the student's level of motivation, self-confidence, and self-image. These three all need to be at a very high level. Along with these, there needs to be a very low level of anxiety. If this is not the case, language learning will be blocked. The presence of an affective filter is like encountering a closed door and being unable to enter a room. One must be able to remove the blockage to learn language or open the door before being able to enter the room. My goal in teaching my students a second language will be to open these doors. Thus, this is a very helpful hypothesis for my project.

Another very helpful guide to language learning comes from Brown (1994). Called "communicative language teaching," this broad-based synthesis of theories about the nature of language, language learning, and teaching includes four main characteristics. The first is that the focus of the classroom should not be restricted to grammatical and linguistic competence. The goal should be to pay attention to all of the components of communicative competence. Secondly, learners should be engaged in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for purposes that have meaning. Thirdly, teaching needs to relate fluency and accuracy and practice in ways that complement each other. The level of importance of each ebbs and flows depending on the needs of the

student. Lastly, language needs to be utilized in unrehearsed contexts. This applies to both speaking and listening. These unrehearsed situations can easily occur under the guidance of the teacher.

Play

Before I can discuss integrating play into a first-grade Language Arts curriculum, play must be defined. According to Shipley (1993), there are six main items that should be noted when defining play. The motivation for play comes from within the child and not from social demands or competition. Secondly, the focus is on the process and not on the end product. Thirdly, the objects being utilized during play are familiar to the child. Next, the child is pretending. The objects utilized while pretending are used in a fashion other than their original intent. The fifth item is that there are not any rules coming from outside the child which govern the play. Games come with this type of rules, but not play. Lastly, the child is actively involved in the activity. Play does not include watching television or aimlessly wandering around a classroom.

Another attempt at defining play comes from Ecklind (2007). He posits five main characteristics of play. To begin, a child imposes a beginning and an end to what he/she is doing. Objects are not used according to their real intent. The child's reality during this period of time is whatever is going on in the child's thoughts, not the reality of the adult world. Next, play is intrinsically motivated. Children don't pursue the activities they are involved in because of any external drive such as trying to earn something or please someone else. When children play, their focus is on the process of their creation.

They are not concerned about creating a finished product. The fourth point is about free choice. An adult cannot be the one telling the child what to do. The child must make that decision. Lastly, there has to be an element of pleasure to the activity. The child enjoys what he/she is doing. Lillard *et al.* (2012) notes that pretend play creates motivation for a child to learn. If literacy development is the desired end product for a teacher, pretend play could be the context that will motivate the child to engage with literacy materials.

Development of Play

Now that the term *play* has been defined, let's see how play develops in children. According to Piaget (1962) the three main stages of play are practice, symbolic play, and games with rules. During the first 18 months of life, a child practices learning about the body and objects by repeatedly reaching, grasping, banging, etc. As the child practices, accidental combinations occur. With further development, a child deliberately combines actions, words or materials with a particular intention.

Piaget's second stage, symbolic play, develops during the two-to-seven year age range. Children's pretending becomes more and more complex after age four. They begin to imitate reality more closely. When children interact socially with their peers, they become involved in socio-dramatic play.

From ages seven to twelve, children's socio-dramatic play begins to diminish, and children begin to get involved in games with rules (Piaget, 1962). Reality is copied more closely. Plays and puppet shows will have roles that are closely based on a set theme.

Early playful interactions create social development. There is socialization (what should we build now?) and problem solving (how can we make this city bigger?), cooperation (if we work together we can make our city even better!) and language development (learning what to say to get their messages across to one another). Play is how children begin to make real friendships. Since social interaction becomes more complex as a child accumulates social experiences, social play can be divided into five levels of development (Howes,1989). From age 18 months to age 2, children engage in parallel play. Children play beside each other, possibly even conducting the same activity, but they do not acknowledge each other. They do not even make eye contact. Level 2 is parallel play with mutual regard. This is the same as level 1 but the children are aware of each other and they do look at each other. Around age 3, children start to interact and play socially. This is the third level. While playing the same or similar activity, the children will smile at or touch each other, offer or take a toy and even comfort a distressed friend. Level 4 is complementary and reciprocal play. With mutual awareness, when playing together, one child may change how the other child is playing. These children have an awareness of each other's roles. A prime example would be rolling a ball back and forth to each other. The last level is complementary and social play. This is a combination of levels 3 and 4. While two children are playing together, one child makes a suggestion. The other child verbally agrees to it and completes the suggestion. Social play becomes more and more interactive with mutual accommodations.

In the development of play, there is both object and symbolic play (Johnson, 1987). Up to one year of age, a child will only play with one object at a time in an unpredictable fashion. As the child gets older, he or she will use more objects at the same time in a more complex fashion. By age four, play is organized and goal-oriented.

Between the ages of 2 – 7, Piaget (1962) has defined how play develops. First to emerge is symbolic play. The child will apply a single symbolic scheme to new objects taken from imitations learned through his/her own personal experiences.

The second type includes imitated behaviors taken from other models. For example, a child may pick up an object to bang on something, imitating what he/she has seen a parent doing while hammering nails or playing a drum. As symbolic play evolves into the third type, the child combines multiple symbolic ideas that often replicate reality. To summarize, as the age of the child increases, the variety and diversity of pretend actions increase. Johnson (1987) adds that the child can consciously take on the role of another person while engaging in pretend play.

Learning Through Play

Now that we have discussed the development of play, let's turn to theories about how learning and play develop and interact. According to Ecklind (2007), there are four main types of play through which children create and recreate learning experiences . They are “mastery play, innovative play, kinship play, and therapeutic play” (page 87). Mastery play helps children construct skills and concepts. Thus, infants explore the world with their bodies and through their senses. With repetitive play, children develop

the concept of object permanence. This is when the child realizes that objects exist even when they can no longer be seen. Once this takes place, children play by ordering objects into groups. The groups may be items that are alike and those that are different. This mastery is organized and purposeful.

Innovative play begins after a skill is mastered. The child then wants to expand and elaborate upon that skill. This can also be seen in language skills. Word play will take place when the child has acquired word meanings. This can be seen when children learn and repeat riddles, make up nonsense words related to real ones, and pretend to speak a foreign language.

What do cats like to eat for breakfast?

Mice Krispies.

Why did the cat run from the tree?

Because it was afraid of the bark!

(<http://catnipsum.com/blog/cats-on-catnip/the-list-of-30-silly-one-liner-cat-jokes/668>)

Kinship play occurs when children of about the same size, age, and skill level play together. This type of play introduces children to social learning and cooperative activities. Though kinship play does not require a common language or culture, children enjoy engaging with someone who is similar to them.

When my daughter was in first grade, we lived in an apartment complex where several Japanese families lived. One family had a daughter who was also in first grade. She and my daughter went to school together. After school, she would come to our place to play with my daughter. They could not speak each other's language but they both liked to play with dolls. They would speak to each other in their own native language even though they did not understand each other. Through the use of gestures and the mutual understanding of how to play with dolls, the girls would play together for extended periods of time.

Lastly, therapeutic play is where children learn to deal with stress. Imaginary friends may be created to represent fantasy surrogates of a child's impulsive side. The imaginary friend will be the one who takes the blame for anything the child should not have done.

Play takes on new functions as children move from early childhood into the elementary school years. Play begins to become work as they learn to read and do math (Ecklind, 2007).

Based on this information, I can expect that first-grade students will be able to play in several different ways which utilizes their imagination. Their play could also show imitations of other people. They will also be able to play games which have rules.

Literacy Development

The National Reading Panel (2000) has conducted an extensive study of the research surrounding reading. Of the many aspects, four are pertinent to my proposed study. They are phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency, and vocabulary instruction as it relates to text comprehension.

Phonemic awareness and the knowledge of letters are the two best predictors of how well children will learn to read during kindergarten and first grade. The English language has forty-one phonemes. These are the smallest units of this spoken language. Syllables and words are created by combining phonemes. Phonemic awareness occurs when one can focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. When learning phonemic awareness, a child should focus on one or two main skills. Secondly, these skills should be taught in small groups. Next, children should actually use letters to learn phonemes. The letters could be physical objects such as alphabet magnets or cards with the letters written on them. Lastly, the lesson should be about twenty five minutes in length.

Phonics instruction comes after (or along with) phoneme awareness. In learning phonics, a child begins to recognize how letters correspond to phonemes and larger subunits of words. This will help students sound out word segments and combine those parts to form words. Phonics knowledge helps children to be more accurate in predicting words when they are read in context. To help children acquire phonics awareness, there are three main guidelines a teacher should follow. First, there needs to be a planned,

sequential introduction to the teaching of the phonemic elements. This needs to be accompanied by practicing the elements taught. Secondly, kindergarten and first grade are the most important times to teach phonics. After that, the impact of phonics teaching diminishes. Lastly, in kindergarten and first grade, phonics instruction has a very profound impact on spelling. In summary, phonics instruction appears to contribute the most to a child's growth in reading.

Next in importance comes fluency. Fluency in reading aloud and silently occurs when a child can read a text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is contingent upon well-developed word recognition. Repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance are the strongest aids in helping all students improve reading fluency.

Vocabulary learning means being able to decode and read words found in a reader's oral vocabulary. The benefit of being able to decode a word benefits the reader only if the word is known to them orally. Otherwise the child will not understand the word, and the decoding will be compromised. Reading ability and vocabulary size are directly related. A large oral vocabulary helps a child make the transition from oral to written vocabulary (The Panel, 2000). On the subject of oral vocabulary, a child's vocabulary is linked to one's socio-economic status (SES). First graders from a higher SES know twice as many words as do children from a lower SES (Beck, McKeown, Kucan, 2002). Children from a higher SEC are spoken to much more than children from a lower SEC. Because children from a lower SEC hear a smaller number words and are a part of fewer lengthy conversations, there is a significant vocabulary disparity already by 36 months of

age. (Farkas, G., & K. Beron in National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009) Vocabulary teaching, through both direct and indirect methods, can increase a reader's comprehension, especially if the words taught are concrete words as opposed to abstract words (The Panel, 2000).

Considering the Developing Child When Designing Curriculum

One needs to understand a child's typical pattern of growth in order to fit teaching language and integrating play into the curriculum so it is at his/her developmental level. (Wood, 2007). A child's strengths, needs, and interests play a big part in his/her development. Although general patterns of development may be the same among children of the same age, a child's personal experiences and ways of thinking will be uniquely affected by cultural patterns of interests and talents. This variability is shown in play. A child's interests as well as strengths are revealed. Another element that needs to be understood is the child's sociocultural contexts for living and growing. Rules and expectations for behavior are conveyed through language use and nonverbal communication. They are affected in part by a child's learning style, and social skills (Owocki, 1999). When curriculum standards are created, they need to be aligned across children's developmental stages and age levels. How children develop and learn needs to be understood and taken into consideration for the standard to be beneficial.

By age six, children are rapidly changing. They enjoy physical activity. They are always in a hurry. When they do their school work, they are more interested in the process. They are not concerned about what the end result looks like. The work tends to

be sloppy. These children are energetic and enthusiastic. A room of six- year olds can be very noisy as they like to talk a lot. They are also beginning to change intellectually. They are beginning to reason things in a logical manner and understand another person's perspective (Wood, 2007).

When children become seven or eight years old, they become conscious that they are imitating others. Their maturation of intelligence is controlling their imitation, instead of imitating without thinking about what they are doing. Their level of imitation has also grown. They analyze the person who is their model and recreate this person's actions more carefully with a greater degree of detail (Piaget, 1962).

J. David Cooper (2000) emphasizes that even though everyone goes through similar stages of development, these stages occur at varying rates. Children have to interact with peers and adults to acquire language and learn to play using it. This includes creative language that is just an approximation of real words and phrases.

Curriculum Design

Wiggins and McTighe (2006) recommend a curriculum design process which they call Backward Design. They have a three-stage approach to planning Backward Design. In stage one, the desired results need to be identified. The content standards and curriculum expectations need to be examined. Stage two is to plan the assessment. The items which will be used as evidence of student understanding and proficiency need to be determined. Once this has been determined, one will be able to assess if the students have achieved the desired results. The third stage is then to plan the learning experiences

and instruction. All teaching and learning should point toward the assessment.

Understanding the assessment helps to keep the lesson planning focused toward the intended results.

In summary, this chapter surveys theories about first language development so I can be confident about what my students already know. Next, the chapter studies how a child learns a second language. Since I would like to develop oral English and teach reading at the same time, I have also included an overview of theories about literacy development. Since play, which includes playing games, is what I will utilize to integrate second language learning and literacy development, I have also included definitions of play. I have explored how a child learns to play and when a child is developmentally able to play games with rules. I have also touched on research about the developing child to guide me in designing developmentally appropriate curriculum. Lastly, I have explored how to design curriculum which utilizes the backward design model.

CHAPTER THREE

Curriculum Design

The curriculum design chapter is divided into several sections. Setting and school population gives a brief overview of the school where I work. Caseload demographics gives specific information about the students I work with. General academic difficulties discusses some problem areas for second language learners. Elements of the curriculum examines the parts of the curriculum that will be developed. Course outcomes defines what the students will learn.

Setting and School Population

The setting for this study is an elementary school that is located in a first- ring suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The school educates 529 children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade with 65% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Of those children, 47 are Hispanic, 1 is American Indian, 35 are Asian/Pacific islanders, 182 are Black or African American, 201 are White, and 63 are two or more races.

Caseload Demographics

Out of this population, 65 are English language learners. I currently work with 43 children in kindergarten through fifth grade. Their languages include Spanish, Cantonese Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, French from Cameroon, Somali, and English from Liberia.

General Academic Difficulties

Playing games with rules and integrating play into the first grade Language Arts curriculum could be a key component to helping my English language learning students learn to speak and read in English. Over the past several years, I have worked with students helping them learn to speak and read in English. At the beginning of the school year, my first graders were tested for reading readiness skills and they did very poorly. They could not segment words. When told a word, they could not come up with a rhyming word. When shown the letters of the alphabet, they could name most of the letters but they did not know what sounds the letters made. They read very few sight words. All of these children went through kindergarten at our school. All three of our teachers did an excellent job teaching reading readiness skills. Every day these students spent 30 minutes with me where we worked on learning to communicate in English.

Elements of the Curriculum

I will create a curriculum to help enrich the current first-grade Language Arts curriculum. The curriculum will include vocabulary development, games with rules as well as a list of items that the students could use while playing around with the theme of the story. I have developed my own game and play-based curriculum that will coincide with and strengthen the Language Arts curriculum that is being utilized in the first-grade classroom. There will also be a means of assessing the learning. Each element of the design is supported by research written by experts in the field. This curriculum is intended to be used as a resource to further advance the learning of my second language

learners. This curriculum will answer the question: Could the integration of games and play into the first grade Language Arts curriculum make a difference in helping English learners (EL) increase oral language fluency with the possible potential of increasing literacy skills?

Course Outcomes

Learning activities and assessments are based on the desired outcomes. Upon completion of a unit surrounding a story, the students will be able to:

1. Use the key vocabulary words correctly.
2. Listen to and understand the story.
3. Play the associated game.
4. Play collaboratively with peers with realia connected to the story.
5. Orally summarize the story using the key vocabulary words.
6. Read the story summary which includes the key vocabulary words.

Chapter Summary

Providing a play-centered environment in which students can engage with their peers in games and free play centered on a single story will enable students to better develop English oral vocabulary. Story related play will help them to develop a stronger sense of the story and help them utilize the key vocabulary words. Being able to use the key vocabulary words will help them to orally summarize the story and read the story summary.

CHAPTER 4

I will utilize Wiggins and McTighe's (2006) Backward Design model while preparing my curriculum.

Stage 1-Identify Desired Results for the Entire Unit

Establish Goals:

Standard 1.303-Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

Standard 1.1.2.2-Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

Standard 1.8.1.1-Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

Standard 1.8.1.1b-Build on other's talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.

What essential understandings will the teacher consider?

- How do students sound out words?
- How do students summarize a story?
- How do students play a game with rules?
- During play, how do students participate collaboratively with peers? How are problems solved?

What understandings are desired?

Students will understand.....

- How to sound out words.
- How to summarize a story.
- How to play a game with rules.
- How to solve problems and participate collaboratively with their peers.

Stage 2-Determine Acceptable Evidence**What evidence will show that students understand?**

- After the vocabulary lesson, students will orally create sentences with the vocabulary word.
- During the reading of the story, students will indicate they hear a key vocabulary word by raising their hand.
- During the matching game, students will sound out words and correctly match the words to the pictures.
- During the games with rules and unstructured play, students will talk to each other and collaborate with each other.
- Students will retell the story utilizing the sentence frames if they need them.
- Students will read the story summary using their phonics skills and knowledge of the key word vocabulary.

Stage 3-Plan the Learning Experiences

1. Teach the key vocabulary.
2. Have the students use the vocabulary orally in sentences.
3. Play the matching games with the vocabulary.
4. Read the story to the students having them listen for the key vocabulary words.
5. Play the story-centered game that I have created.
6. Engage in story-centered free-play utilizing realia that can represent actual items from the story.
7. Summarize the story.
8. Read the story summary.

What the curriculum looks like

Teach the key vocabulary that is needed to understand the story A Taste of Salt (from Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Language Arts). After the word is taught, have students work in pairs and come up with oral sentences using the word. Sentence frames are provided to guide the students in this process.

Vocabulary Lesson

King: A king is a male ruler of a country. He will rule his country for as long as he lives. He will make all of the laws or rules for that country.



If I were the king, I would make a law that says _____.

Sugar: Sugar is sweet. It is in certain kinds of food like fruit or honey. It can be added to food to give it a sweet taste.



Sugar could be added to _____ to make it taste sweet.

Honey: Honey is brownish, thick and sticky, and is made by bees. It is very sweet.



Honey is _____. (made by bees, sticky, sweet)

Mango: A mango is a fruit. It has a yellow, red or green skin . The inside part is yellow-orange. It is sweet and juicy.



Mango is a _____ (sweet, juicy, yellow) fruit.

Salt: Salt is white. It looks like sand. It makes food taste good.



If you sprinkle some salt on _____ , it might taste better.

Forest: A place where a lot of trees grow closely together. A lot of different animals live in the forest.



_____ (deer, bears, wolves) live in the forest.

Spinach: Spinach is a green leafy vegetable.



I think I might to like to eat spinach if it were served with _____.

Play a couple versions of the following matching game.

Matching Game

Materials: Pocket chart, a set of vocabulary word pictures, a set of vocabulary words

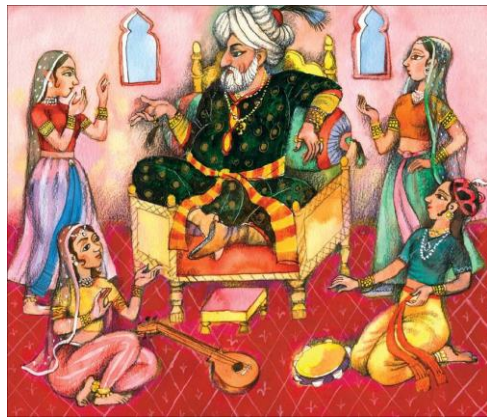
1. The teacher models how the game will be played. Place all of the vocabulary pictures in a pocket chart. Name each item and discuss the beginning sound and beginning letter of each picture. Place all of the word cards, facedown, in front of you. The words will be: king, sugar, honey, mango, salt, forest, and spinach. Pick up a word, say the name of the first letter, say the sound of the first letter, sound out the remaining letters, and suggest which picture it belongs to. Some of the words, like sugar, honey, and salt can't be sounded out correctly. Students will need to be able to name each picture, think about how it sounds, use the phonics skills they have and sometimes make some guesses. During this portion, the

teacher will model what guessing looks and sounds like. Have the students discuss whether or not they agree with you. Make a mistake sometimes on words that might be very obvious. Assuming the students catch your mistake, have them explain their thinking and have them tell you where the word really goes.

2. Now it is the students' turn to play the game. Put all of the pictures in the pocket chart. Spread the word cards, facedown, in front of the students. A student will pick up a card, say the beginning sound, sound out remaining letters, and decide where the word goes on the pocket chart. The other students will discuss if they agree with the choice or not. If they don't agree, they will talk about where they think the word should go. An alternate version would be to have a student turn over a word card and have the entire class discuss which picture it belongs to. When they have made a joint decision, the student then places the word under the picture in the pocket chart.
3. Arrange all of the picture cards, facedown, in a grid on a table. On the same table, put all of the word cards, facedown, in a separate grid. Have a student turn over a picture card, say what it is, say the beginning sound, and the corresponding letter. Then the student has to turn over a word card, say the beginning sound or entire word and determine if the picture and word matches. If the two match, the student says, "It's a match!" and keeps the two cards. If the two don't match, the student says, "It's not a match," and turns the two cards back over.

Once the vocabulary game has been completed, read the story to the students. Tell them that every time they hear one of the vocabulary words, they should put a thumb up and say the word.

Read the Story to the Students



Slide 1

A Taste of Salt (from Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Language Arts, permission pending)
A Tale from India

There was once a very rich king who had four smart, beautiful daughters. The king loved all four daughters dearly, but he wondered if they loved him just as much in return. The king was so concerned about how much his daughters loved him, he decided to ask them about it. He gathered all of his daughters together and asked, “How much do you love me?”

“I love you as much as I love sugar,” said the oldest daughter.

“I love you as much as I love honey,” replied the next one.

“I love you as much as I love sweet mangos,” said the third daughter.

“I love you as much as I love salt,” answered the youngest one.

When he heard the last answer, the king frowned.



Slide 2

A Taste of Salt

The king could not believe what his youngest daughter had said. How could she love him like salt? He asked her again and again, but she gave the same answer each time. The king became so angry that he sent her away into the forest to live on her own.

The poor, lonely girl was walking through the forest when she heard the *clip-clop*, *clip-clop* of a horse. She quickly hid in the bushes, but the rider spotted her there. The rider was a young prince. He stopped to help the poor girl. He was kind and friendly and soon the girl began to trust him. He offered to share his bread with her and to take her to his home.

The prince and his family took care of the girl and treated her very kindly. The prince and the girl fell in love, and were married.



Slide 3

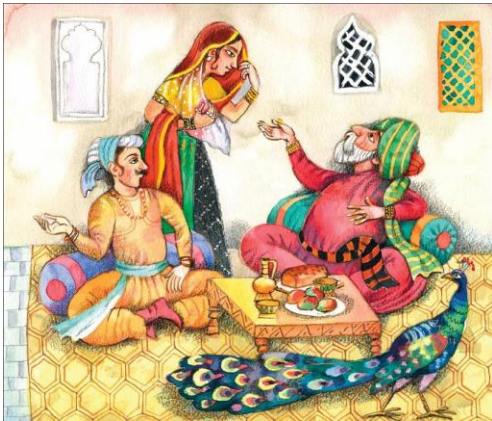
A Taste of Salt

A few years later, the king happened to visit the home of the prince and his new wife.

Now the king did not know what had happened to the youngest daughter he had sent away. He did not know that she had married the prince and was now a member of this royal family.

The princess recognized her father immediately but did not say anything. She remembered how pleased her father had been when her sisters told him that they loved him as much as sugar, honey, and mangos. So she prepared foods that were all very sweet.

With a veil covering her face, she served her father fruit with sugar, bread with honey, and sweet mangos. The king only took tiny tastes of the foods. Though he was very hungry, he longed for a proper dinner, not a plate of sweets.



Slide 4

A Taste of Salt

The princess then brought the king a bowl of ordinary spinach that was salted just right. It was food the farmers ate and was not fit for a king. But the king tasted the salty dish and ate it all!

When she saw the happiness on the king's face, the princess took off her veil and smiled at her father, saying, "Oh father, I love you as much as I love salt." Then she said, "My love for you may be ordinary, but it is true and will last forever!"

The king finally understood the importance of salt, and what a terrible mistake he had made long ago. The king knew how fortunate he was to have his wonderful, loving daughter back again. He would never make such a mistake again!

After the story has been read, the students are ready to play the story-centered game. The game will reinforce the sequence of the story as well reinforce the vocabulary.

Play the Game

A Taste of Salt Game Directions

For 2 to 5 players

Contents:

Game board, 5 sets of pictures with 9 pictures per set (1st king, sugar, honey, sweet mangoes, salt, forest, prince, wedding, king visits), 5 rectangular sheets with 9 spaces each, die, 5 player tokens, sheet with sentence frames, instruction sheet.

Objective

Summarize the story A Taste of Salt as the game is being played. Roll the dice to collect the 9 picture cards. Continue to roll the dice. The first person to get rid of the sugar, honey, sweet mangoes, and salt picture cards and enters the finish space is the winner.

Preparing to play

Each player will get a set of 9 picture cards which consist of 1st king, sugar, honey, sweet mangoes, salt, forest, prince, wedding, and king visits . The cards will be placed face up in front of each player. Each player will take a rectangular sheet with the 9 empty spaces. This will be used to place the pictures as they are acquired while playing the game. Each player will choose a colored pawn and place it on the start position on the game board.

Playing the Game

1. Choose a player to go first by having each player roll the die. The player with the highest number goes first. Play will then continue clockwise.
2. Roll the die. Move the token that number of spaces. More than 1 player may occupy the same space. In the first half of the game, if the player comes to a space with a vocabulary word on it, the player must stop on that space, even if a higher number is rolled. From the picture cards in front of the player, he/she will pick up the picture card that corresponds to the vocabulary word and put that picture on the blank sheet with the 9 spaces. That will be the end of that player's turn. The player will often not move the actual number on the die.
3. As each card is collected, the student must say a sentence that goes with that card.

The sentences are as follows:

When the student collects the:

First King: "How much do you love me?"

Sugar: "I love you as much as I love sugar."

Honey: "I love you as much as I love honey."

Sweet Mangoes: "I love you as much as I love sweet mangoes."

Salt: "I love you as much as I love salt."

Forest: "Youngest daughter, you will go away to the forest to live."

Prince: “Here is some bread. Come to my home with me. My family will take care of you.”

Wedding: “The prince and the princess fall in love and get married.”

The King Visits: “I will make a good meal for you.”

After the king visits, the students will continue to roll the die to move around the board. This time, when a player comes to a space with a vocabulary word on it, the player must put the picture card onto the CARDS space on the board and say the following sentences:

Sugar: “Have some fruit with sugar.”

Honey: “Have some bread with honey.”

Sweet Mangoes: “Have some sweet mangoes.”

Salt: “Have some ordinary spinach with salt.”

Finish: “I love you as much as I love salt. My love for you will last forever.”

Student sentences to be spoken during the game as they collect and discard the picture cards:

First King: “How much do you love me?”

Sugar: “I love you as much as I love sugar.”

Honey: “I love you as much as I love honey.”

Sweet Mangoes: “I love you as much as I love sweet mangoes.”

Salt: “I love you as much as I love salt.”

Forest: “Youngest daughter, you will go away to the forest to live.”

Prince: “Here is some bread. Come to my home with me. My family will take care of you.”

Wedding: “The prince and the princess fall in love and get married.”

The King Visits: “The princess makes a meal for the king.”

Sugar: “Have some fruit with sugar.”

Honey: “Have some bread with honey.”

Sweet Mangoes: “Have some sweet mangoes.”

Salt: “Have some ordinary spinach with salt.”

Finish: “I love you as much as I love salt. My love for you will last forever.”

Game Board



The board for collecting the cards and the board with the collected cards



The students are now given the opportunity to play with items that are associated with the story. It will be a time to further practice the vocabulary words. There will not be any rules connected to this play. The play will also be unrehearsed. As the teacher, my hopes would be that they would act out the story. However, I would also hope that they would set their own imagination into motion and add to the original story.

Play

Put together a box of items that the students could use in their play. There would be male and female puppets which could represent the king, his four daughters, the prince and his family. Items of realia could be a crown, scarves, a shaker of salt, a container of sugar and a container of honey. Plastic food items would include mango and a bunch of spinach. There should also be plates, silverware, and napkins.

Oral Summary of the Story

It is now time to orally summarize the story. The student may be able to summarize the story without any support but if support is needed from the teacher, I have created sentence frames to guide the summary. Most first-graders don't understand how to summarize a story sequentially. With teacher guidance, the student can be successful.

Summary with Sentence Frames

In the beginning the _____ (king) asked his _____ (daughters) how much they _____ (loved him). The first daughter said _____ (she loved him as much as sugar). The second daughter said _____ (she loved him as much as honey). The third daughter said

_____ (she loved him as much as sweet mangoes). The fourth daughter said _____ (she loved him as much as salt). The king was _____ (unhappy with her answer). He sent her _____ (away to the forest). In the _____ (forest) she met the _____ (prince). He took her to his (home). They _____ (fell in love and got married). The _____ (king came to visit). The princess made _____ (a meal for the king). She told him to _____ (have some fruit with sugar). She gave him _____ (some bread with honey). She told him to _____ (have some sweet mangoes). When he started complaining about all of the sweet foods, she told him to _____ (have some ordinary spinach with salt). He _____ (loved) the _____ (spinach with the salt). She told the king _____ (she was his daughter). She told him _____ (I love you as much as I love salt. My love for you will last forever).

Reading the Story

The last part of the assessment would be having the student read the summary of the story.

In the beginning the king asked his daughters how much they loved him. The first daughter said that she loved him as much as sugar. The second daughter said that she loved him as much as honey. The third daughter said that she loved him as much as sweet mangoes. The fourth daughter said that she loved him as much as salt. The king was unhappy with her answer. He sent her away to the forest. In the forest she met the prince. He took her to his home. They fell in love and got married. The king came to visit. The princess made a meal for the king. She told him to have some fruit with sugar.

She gave him some bread with honey. She told him to have some sweet mangoes. When he said he did not like all of the sweet foods, she told him to have some ordinary spinach with salt. He loved the spinach with the salt. She told the king she was his daughter. She told him she loved him as much as she loved salt. Her love for him would last forever.

Chapter 5

Reflection on My Learning and Writing

Our lives are an incredible journey. We meet people and experience events without thinking beyond that very moment. When I was going to college for my Bachelor's degree, I took classes from Dr. Carol Prutting. Her field was the development of language and how to help children with a language disorder. My classmates and I ridiculed her avant-garde mannerisms and teaching style. Because we were young and she was different from us, we didn't want to focus on what she was teaching, but rather, on how she was teaching. When I started this project, I started to remember her and her insistence that when a teacher infuses play into instruction, the student will more fully learn that which is being taught. Even though I do not work with students with a language disorder but with students who are learning English as a second language, I wondered if infusing play into my curriculum could help my first-grade students. I wanted to help them acquire English as well as help them develop literacy.

The research process proved to be a bit over-whelming at times. When I first started, I was collecting my research about all of the different components at the same time. I had a stack of material that was not well organized. I was then trying to write about each component as I read about it, starting at the top of my stack, working my way to the bottom.

Looking back, my initial process was like that of a 5 year old kindergartner encountering his or her first winter in school, needing to prepare to go outside to play in the snow. The child gathers all of the items needed: coat, boots, snow-pants, mittens, hat,

and scarf. Not thinking about where to start, boots replace shoes. The scarf is next in the pile of clothing so that is picked up and put around the neck. Mittens catch the child's attention so they are picked up and put on the hands. The coat is red and since the child likes that color, that is the next item picked up. After the coat is put on, the child realizes it can't be zipped because of the mittens. The mittens have to be removed and then the coat can be zipped. The mittens are replaced onto the hands. The next largest item is the snow-pants which are the type with suspenders and a front zipper. The child tries to insert the legs into the snow-pants wondering why the feet are getting stuck. Suddenly there is a realization that the snow boots are too large to go through the pant legs. Snow-pants are removed. Boots are removed. The child again tries to put on the snow-pants. The legs go into the pant legs but now the suspenders won't go over the coat. Oh dear. The coat needs to be removed but the zipper can't be un-done. Once again, the mittens need to be removed after which the coat is removed. The mittens can once again be put on the hands. The suspenders are placed over the shoulders but the zipper can't be pulled up because the mittens are in the way, and so on.

This analogy is a bit over-extended but I wanted you, the reader, to feel the frustration. I didn't have any experience in putting together a project of this magnitude. Yet, I wanted to try to figure it out for myself. Needless to say, I made a lot of mistakes along the way. However, because of those mistakes, I learned how to create this type of project more efficiently. I learned to first put on the snow-pants, then the boots, coat, scarf, hat, and lastly, the mittens. Yet, even in this model, there is still a lot of variability.

I had to learn, through a process of trial and error, what worked best for me and then to implement that process.

First, I had to create what I felt was a logical sequence for researching each area that was to be included in my research. I then sorted my research materials to reflect my sequence. Next, I thoroughly read about each section and wrote a summary for that section. Lastly, focusing on my capstone question, I was then able to create a curriculum unit which infused play and games into learning to speak English as a second language as well as learn to read in English.

When conducting my research, I felt there were many areas that needed to be explored. I surveyed theories about first language development so I could be confident about what my students already know. I studied how a child learns a second language. Since I would like to develop oral English and teach reading at the same time, I included an overview of theories about literacy development. Since play, which includes playing games with rules, is what I wanted to utilize to integrate second language learning and literacy development, I included definitions of play. I explored how a child learns to play and when a child is developmentally able to play games with rules. I also touched on research about the developing child to guide me in designing developmentally appropriate curriculum. Lastly, I explored how to design curriculum utilizing the Backward Design model which Wiggins and McTighe (2006) are known for. This research helped me develop curriculum for teaching in my classroom. Not only would this research and curriculum be beneficial for me but I also felt it could be used as an extra resource for the mainstream teacher who may not have a full understanding of the

types of extra support which could be beneficial to children learning English as their second language.

Designing the Curriculum

I started the design process with the Backward Design model. I incorporated the first grade Language Arts standards which focused my design. Relying on Piaget's cognitive development theory, the instruction was designed to suit the students' stage of development. At ages six and seven, children should be able to pretend, play games with rules, and interact socially with each other. Wanting to access the scaffolding recommended by Vygotsky, I incorporated both whole group play and small group play. The students would be participating in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and myself, the adult, in small and larger groups. They would also be building on other's talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.

Vocabulary was introduced that the students may not yet understand. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory suggested that lessons should be designed with the student in mind, plus one step beyond his/her current stage of independent language competence. Krashen's input hypothesis suggests the presence of objects (often called *realia*) which correspond to those used in the story, will help vocabulary to more readily be learned. Since objects are nouns, nouns were chosen for the vocabulary words.

Lastly, there has to be an element of pleasure to the activity. The child enjoys what he/she is doing. Since Lillard *et. al* (2012) notes that pretend play is motivating for a

child to learn, I added the element of pretend play. If literacy development is the desired end product for a teacher, pretend play could be the context that will motivate the child to engage with literacy materials.

Plan for Implementation

I created a week-long unit of study which integrates games with rules and play, centered around the first-grade story, A Taste of Salt. This story comes from the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Language Arts curriculum for first-grade. Since the teacher in the mainstream classroom focuses on one story each week, I designed my curriculum to last one week. Following the same model for the curriculum I designed, I would then create game-and-play infused units for future stories the students study throughout the school year. Since Piaget suggests that children aged six to seven also like to take part in plays and puppet shows, I could add those elements to the unit curriculum as class-time allows.

In the future I would like to conduct a study to see if my ideas actually make a difference in the academic progress of English language learners. I would study a single group of first grade English language learners. I would first analyze story summarizing and reading ability of English learning students for a story without any game or play infused curriculum. I would then compare those results to a unit which has a game with rules that reflects the story and lastly to a unit that infused free-play centered around the story. I would be interested in knowing if there is a significant difference in the students' ability to develop oral English skills and reading through these three different styles of teaching a story.

Chapter Summary

As I mentioned, we meet people and experience events without thinking beyond that very moment. I didn't understand Dr. Carol Prutting and her teachings because I grew up in an environment that didn't infuse play into the development of children. In the past, there was learning and work that needed to be done and regardless of what that learning or work was, the child was expected to get down to business and complete the task at hand. It was perceived by the adults that there was not any time to play. There was too much work to do.

Dr. Prutting's teachings left a mark on my consciousness and left me wondering if perhaps she was right. Perhaps I should have spent less time criticizing her mannerisms and her teaching style and spent more time investigating her research. Even though her research is specific to the therapy of language disorders, I have discovered plenty of research that discussed learning through play. One of the best websites that I was pointed to is www.naeyc.org. It is the site for National Association for the Education of Young Children. Once on the site, I searched 'topics'. Under topics, I clicked on 'play'. Anyone interested in the connection between play and learning will be greatly rewarded by investigating this site.

In the future, I will continue to ponder the question that was the impetus for this capstone. Could the integration of games and play into the first grade Language Arts curriculum make a difference in helping English learners (EL) increase oral language fluency with the possible potential of increasing literacy skills? After conducting my research, I believe integrating games with rules and unstructured play into a first-grade

Language Arts curriculum can make a difference. In the future, I will always consider how games and play can be infused into my curriculum to help my English learning students learn oral English and literacy skills.

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