



Teachers' Involvement in Children's Play and Social Interaction

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ABSTRACT: Play serves an important process for promoting children's learning and development besides enhancing emotional, intellectual, and social skills of child in ways that cannot be taught through formal classroom instruction. When children play, teachers' involvement has been a controversial issue since there are both advantages and disadvantages of their involvement. While teacher participation enriches children's play and develops children's intellectual and social skills, if teachers give more structured cognitive activities through play and take over the control, at that time teacher intervention disrupts children's play. Therefore, this qualitative inquiry seeks to obtain a more in-depth understanding of when and how a preschool teacher involves to students play and demonstrates or shows personal practices involving effective participation. As it is supported through the literature review and as the findings of this case study show that teachers should be a model and a demonstrator instead of intervening the play by direct instruction.

Key words: Play, education, child development; socialization; teacher involvement

INTRODUCTION

Play serves an important process for promoting children's learning and development (Kendrick, 2005; Lohfdahl, 2005; Rowe, 1998). Play enhances emotional, intellectual, physical, and social skills of the child in ways that cannot be taught through formal classroom instruction (Pehlivan, 2005; Sevinç, 2004; Dönmez, 1992). Playing a game is a way to guide children who has the basic knowledge about the world and this knowledge open them a way to the language, art, social science, mathematics and physics they will learn (Korkmaz, 2010; Ünal, 2009).

Children's play has many opportunities for learning but, there is no guarantee that children will learn all they need to know through play. Providing opportunities for children to choose among well-planned, varied learning activities enhances the probability that they will learn through play (Morrison, 2000; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). The influence of play on children's developing cognitive capacities, including the skills has been emphasized by both Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) (For reviews of these foundational theorist's work with regard to play and literacy, see Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Roskos & Christie, 2001b; Smolucha & Smolucha 1998).

Teacher involvement has been a controversial issue since there are both advantages and disadvantages of teacher involvement. Teacher participation enriches children's play and develops children's intellectual and social skills. On the other hand, if teachers give more structured cognitive activities through play, and take over the control of play at that time teacher intervention disrupts children's play (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005; Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998). Therefore, what follows is a brief historical background on this debate.

Until 1960s there has been an understanding that teachers should not interfere in children's play. Adult's role was to set the stage and to observe children's play. It was believed that "adult intervention would disrupt play, inhibit children from revealing their true feelings, and reduce play's therapeutic benefits" (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1987, p. 21). However, since 1960s and 70s this type of understanding has been changed. Teacher's role in play has become important with Smilansky's play training studies. (Observations in Israel, Chicago and Ohio) She found "Most of the culturally disadvantaged children do not play sociodramatic play. The natural

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processes of child growth and the nondirective enriched environment in preschool and kindergarten are not enough to give the disadvantaged children the necessary boost. Without some degree of positive intervention by parents and/or teachers, these children will lack the requirements essential to develop sociodramatic play” (Smilansky, 1971, p.30).

Smilansky’s work with disadvantaged Israeli children provided a model research in play training¹. The results of this study appealed other researchers to focus on play training around the world. Besides using Smilansky’s play strategies which include inside and outside intervention in social dramatic play training, these researchers used thematic-fantasy play training. In social dramatic play training, teacher actively participates in the dramatic play of children by enacting a dramatic role which can also be called inside intervention. If adult stays outside and intervene as a couch by addressing suggestions and asking questions, this is called outside intervention. Thematic fantasy is more structured type of training. In this training adult helps children by dramatizing story through reading stories and assigning roles to the children (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005).

Around 70s, Vygotsky believed that adults’ play with children is as important as children’s play with their peers. According to Vygotsky, adults could help children engage in play that children could not do on their own (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998). During 90s researchers studied about teachers’ specific roles in play. With developmentally appropriate practice, there have been increasing amounts of teacher involvement in children’s play. Child initiated, teacher supported play is an important part of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). This increase brought up a concern about play’s quality. Recently researchers have been discussing about importance of how adult get involved and enhance in children’ play.

Importance of play about children’s development has been emphasized. What should be paid attention as teachers’ involvement and when and how this involvement should take place for the benefits of children’s development. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the extent of a preschool teacher’s involvement in children’s play and discuss the role teachers could play in making play a developmental and educational experience. This is because understanding the significance of play could make teachers less hesitant about using play to promote learning and development, and enable them answer questions regarding the value of play. This study is also aims to analyze the following questions in the light of this longstanding discussion and qualitative research design which involves classroom observation, teachers’ interviews and artifact collection: Should teacher be involved in children’s play? How might play centers or classroom be arranged and equipped? What are the types of teacher involvement? What are the pros and cons of this involvement? If the involvement is necessary, when and how it should be happened?

METHODS

Qualitative research uses case study design which means researchers select a subject phenomenon for in depth examination regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study. Selected phenomena may vary from one administrator to one concept or from one program to one process. Thus, case study design is employed for this study to gain an in-depth description, understanding and interpretation of a situation. While in-depth interviews were the primary data collection method, document analysis and researcher observations were supplemental. The third strategy, *interviewee’s verbatim language*, including accounts of conversations, transcripts and direct quotes from documents, provided valuable data.

¹ Play training is teaching children how to play by an adult. With play training adult helps the child develops his/her symbolic play. This training can be applied by children’s regular teachers or a researcher who has special training.

Participants

The research subject in a case study is often a program, an event, an activity, a person, or a group of people (Creswell, 1998). This particular study's subject is a preschool teacher and her students in a daycare center located in one of the Middle States of the United States of America. The research study focuses on the complex issue of exploring a teacher's degree of involvement and practices when students play. This qualitative inquiry seeks to obtain a more in-depth understanding of when and how a preschool teacher involves to students play and demonstrates or shows personal practices involving effective participation.

Participant and the site were selected based on a "purposeful sampling" approach in which "researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). In this approach, samples are chosen based on a set of criteria because they have particular features or characteristics that enable detailed exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2003). Thus, the following criteria were developed for the selection of the participant teacher. The participant teacher should be (a) the most experienced and certified early childhood teacher; (b) knowledgeable in play-supported instruction.

An arranged face-to-face meeting occurred with preschool teachers in their classrooms at the daycare center. After providing brief information of the nature of the research study and a synopsis of the study, teachers responded to basic eligibility questions. Teachers who had less than 8 years teaching experience were excluded from this study due to the study's assumption that experienced teachers, likely, to know better when and how to get involved in students' play than inexperienced teachers. Therefore, teachers who have a minimum eight years experience in education are pre-selected for this study. Based on this criterion of eligibility, the most experienced teacher was selected for this study, and since the participant disallowed use of her real name, a pseudonym is used.

To be able to understand and explore the teacher's involvement and effective practices requires description of the site and the classroom setting where the participant works. The site is a day care which has 132 children enrolled to 4 preschool classrooms (3-5 years old mixed ages) and 4 infant-toddler classrooms (0-3 years old) and one Kindergarten classroom. According to the information gathered from the school administration, the diversity ratio of the center is: 44% Caucasian American, 27% Asian, 8% African American, 4% Hispanic, 6% Indian, 2% Turkish, 2% Egyptian, 5% Russian, and 2% German.

"The day care uses a curriculum that emerges from the children's interests. Topics for exploration emerge from the conversations of and with children, through community and family events, and through knowledge of individual children's particular interests. Each child is regarded as an individual. The day care values and celebrates each child's unique cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic background" (Information gathered from the website of daycare. Retrieved on 12.05.2009).

Mrs. Christy is the preschool teacher who participated in this study. She is married and has three children. She graduated with a bachelor of science in early childhood education and began working at a local childcare center as a preschool teacher. She functioned as a director of a childcare center for a long time. Since February 2001, she has been working as a supervising teacher in the day care in which this current study occurred.

Mrs. Christy has a diverse classroom. The total number of students is 18 and includes 11 Caucasian Americans, 2 Africa-American; 1 Chinese, 2 Korean, 1 Russian and 1 German. The students' average age is 4. Two other teachers have roles in this classroom, and Mrs. Christy is the supervising teacher.

In this particular study the classroom setting has divisions for centers: Science & Math Discovery Center, Writing Center, Reading Center, Art Center, Sensory Play Area, Wood-

working Area, Dramatic Play Area, Computer Area and Block Area. Children are allowed to participate in these areas during center and free play time. Observation of each center area provided insight into the implementations of children’s play practices.

Procedures

The in-depth investigation of the subject of the case study used a variety of data gathering methods to produce evidence leading to understanding of the case and answering the research questions (Creswell, 1998). The researchers used multiple sources of information including observations, interviews, physical artifacts and documents. The participant engaged in one-on-one, in-depth interviews for between sixty and ninety minutes. These interviews employed common, semi-structured conversational interview techniques.

Seven observation sessions were conducted. Each of the observation took 50- 60 minutes. During these observations, the focus was on collecting data regarding classroom materials, props, artifacts, documents and activities which show the degree of teachers’ involvement to students’ play. The length of each observation and the associated activity appear in Table-1.

Table-1: Observation Times and Activities

Date/Time	Length	Activity
1 st observation (9:30am - 10:30am)	60 minutes	Checked the classroom setting/ took field notes, took pictures, observed circle time
2 nd observation (10:00am -10:50am)	50 minutes	Attended Art Center play time and took field notes
3 rd observation (14:30pm - 15:30pm)	60 minutes	Attended Sensory Play Area time and took field notes, took pictures, collected documents/ artifacts
4 th observation (10:00am -10:50am)	50 minutes	Attended Dramatic Play time and center time/took field notes, took pictures, collected documents/ artifacts
5 th observation (10:00am -11:00am)	60 minutes	Attended Wood-working area play time and took field notes, took pictures
6 th observation (13:30pm -14:30pm)	60 minutes	Attended Dramatic Play Area time and took field notes, took pictures
7 th observation (10:00am -10:50am)	50 minutes	Attended free-play time

All audio taped interview sessions were transcribed and classroom observation notes typed as word documents. Completed interviews and transcription of recordings allowed identification of categories of issues, concerns and experiences. Analysis of transcripts involved coding and clustering patterns that appeared. Coding is a process of simultaneously reducing the data by dividing it into units of analysis and coding each unit. The research questions and topics in the interview guide and relevant categories from the literature established initial codes. Data segmentation into relevant units occurred during transcription. However, the intensive analysis began after completion of transcription of recorded tapes to gain a sense of the data as a whole, thereby facilitating the interpretation of smaller units of data. Comparing and contrasting in practically all intellectual tasks during analysis, such as identifying data segments, naming a topic/category and classifying, was the primary technique. Constant comparison is an analytical technique used to analyze the gathered data for this study to determine the distinctive

characteristic of each topic. The categories were tentative in the beginning of the analysis, and they remained flexible to assist in identifying similarities. The process of constant comparison stimulated thought which led to both descriptive and explanatory categories. Arisen topics are categorized and discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

Early childhood teachers have important roles to promote children's play. I believe that in many appropriate ways, teachers can support and improve quality of children's play. As an educator and researcher, let's take a closer look at the observed classroom before involving in play. How does the classroom's play centers arranged and equipped? Do children have enough time to play? After setting the play stage, one needs to ask, how can we extent quality of children's play and roles and themes that interest them the most? Therefore, along with the findings of this study, we will address these questions in the following section.

Set the Stage for Play

Time for play

Nowadays, some researchers, educators, and parents have a big concern about the children's play as well as increasing amount of academic activities while decreasing free play time. Children need time to learn through play. As teachers, we need to arrange our schedule that allows children to plan and carry out play ideas. Especially during dramatic play and constructive play, children need more time to select players and negotiate roles, design objects and construct play props. We have been experiencing that putting all these preparations into action take more time. In planning the daily schedule, teachers can schedule adequate time of free play or center time periods that emphasize dramatic play and related activities. Our own experience with preschool children has shown that during the longer play periods, the more children engage in dramatic and constructive play. If we reduce the number of structured activities during the play, there will be less distraction and more involvement in dramatic play. On the other hand, during a shorter play periods, children mostly engage solitary and parallel play activities. A short play period also causes some behavioral and emotional problems. Children also sometimes get exhausted when they have to stop and clean up. When this happens, some children present some misbehaviors such as; refusing to clean up, refusing to participate in an activity, being disruptive and aggressive, and having a temper tantrum, etc.

Several studies also have showed that long play periods provide more benefits in children's play (Christie and Wardle, 1992; Griffing, 1982; Rogers, &Sawyers, 1988; Johnson, Christie, &Wardle, 2005). These studies also answer how much time is needed for play. My own experience and studies indicate that free play periods should be last 30 to 60 minutes for preschoolers and kindergarten age.

Being flexible is another fact to consider. Teachers should adapt their schedule to fit the activities of children. If children are happy and having fun in play, teachers should take this into the consideration and let them finish their play. According to Rogers and Sawyers (1988), sometimes teachers should allow children to carry their play for next day especially, if they engage in constructive play. We have observed several times that when the kids are engaged in building with blocks, they want to keep their unfinished house, space ship, and submarine's for next free play period.

Space and equipment

Early childhood teachers need to be aware of the importance of creating a play environment. It is important to arrange and examine play areas. Dramatic play area and block

area need special attention. Teachers should provide large open spaces and materials that promote children's participation for block and dramatic play. According to children interest, dramatic play area can turn to theme related play center such as; post office, library, restaurant, camp area, and castle.

“Physical space clearly must be arranged to support the developmental needs of children and the goals we have for them. As the amount of space decreases, the level of social interaction, including aggression, increases. This increase in aggression may also be due to the limited number of toys and activities. When space is reduced, rough and tumble play and running decrease, while physical contacts increase” (Rogers, &Sawyers, 1988, p. 89).

We need play materials for promoting high quality play. It is important to provide materials and equipment that are appropriate to the children's developmental level, and support a nonsexist and multicultural curriculum (Bredekamp, &Copples, 1997). To encourage children's constructive play; we can provide art materials, big and small blocks, puzzles, manipulative toys such as connectors, and magnetiles. For children's pretend play; teachers can provide necessary theme related costumes, and materials such as for restaurant theme; plates, pots, pretend foods, waitress and chef costumes, notebooks, pencils, cash register, pretend money, menu, tables and chairs with necessary decorations, and kitchen utensils. “Teachers chose such equipment to create a world in which children could carry out activities suitable for the expression of their natural mode of behavior, play. All of the aforementioned equipment had the effect of facilitating children's success in their first educational venture outside the home” (Sponseller, 1974, p.64).

Outdoor play environment and materials also should promote high-quality play. Teachers should provide appropriate play environment and materials for children to engage gross-motor and pretend play activities.

Build on Children's Experiences

Teachers can help children to build new experiences, extend and enrich ideas for play as well as finding ways to stimulate children's imaginative play. For example; teachers can arrange field trips to help children to observe about work related jobs. They can invite people to their classroom to talk about their job. They can also read books and watch videos to learn the facts about different jobs. (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999) “Field trips, stories, books, holidays, visitors, and family-type experiences form the basis for pretend play. The broader children's experiences are, the more likely they are to expand on interesting themes in pretend play.” (Rogers,& Sawyers, 1998, p.104).

Observing Children's Play

Early childhood professionals should observe children's play before intervene. Teachers can learn how children play and use the learning outcomes of play in planning classroom activities. Through observation, teachers can get more information about children's play and themes that interest them. From Griffing's (1982) point of view; play observation helps teachers to understand which activities and what settings children use mostly, how complex is the play, what is the social context for play, what is the content of the play, what themes and roles does the child undertake and how are these developed, what is the duration of play, how does child's communication with others in the play situations?

By analyzing children's play through these questions; teachers can get clues for guidance of play. Play observations also provide important understanding about children's social worlds. “Observation reveals what help, if any, children need to develop and extend their play” (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999, p.208).

Participating in Children's Play

Teachers have a key role in fostering play, especially when they involve in supportive and appropriate ways in children's play. Several researchers have described various teacher roles supporting children's play (Christie& Enz, 1992; Roskos& Neuman, 1993; Segal, 2004; Griffing, 1992; Sponseller, 1974; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). These studies have also discussed which roles have positive and negative effects on play. They also categorized these roles under different terms. Johnson, Christie, & Wardle (2005) illustrated a figure that shows a continuum of teacher roles in play. In this figure, effective roles are in the middle and the roles that have negative effect are either end.

In the following section, we will discuss facilitative roles that have positive effect on children's play and precarious roles that have negative effect on children's play. Besides describing teachers' roles briefly, we will also provide examples of the type of interaction from my own experiences and observations of children's play for this specific study.

Facilitative Roles

Onlooker

As an onlooker, teachers watches and listens to children's play. Their spot is near the play area, not in the play. Teachers should make verbal comments; give smile or other non-verbal signs and ask about their play. "The observer role is obvious and similar to that played in other areas of the early childhood classroom. In the case of play, teachers must observe carefully to determine whether, when, how, and with whom to intervene" (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p.163). Through observing children's play, teachers also can get clues about their interests.

Based on the observation for this case study, the following example presents the teacher in an onlooker role:

Several children were playing in the dramatic play area and Mrs. Christy was watching them. Girls were busy with wearing fancy dresses, putting slippers. One of them took a camera and said "let's go girls!" Mrs. Christy asked "where are you going?" They said "we are going to Disneyland." The teacher responded to them "you look so pretty, I think you are ready for spring. Is it time to go on vacation?" Then they looked at the teacher and gave a smile, and continued to their play.

Stage manager

Stage managers stay out of the play and do not do anything to disrupt play like onlookers. However, stage managers help children to provide suggestions and assistance to organize play setting, play materials and props (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). "As stage manager, teachers can help to provide a theme for the play that organizes it around a set of common experiences or knowledge, and they can provide time, space, and props to enhance the play" (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p.163).

Following vignette presents the teacher in the stage manager role:

Kids were busy with playing in the restaurant. Keaton was pretending a costumer. He asked for meatballs to eat. Nick (chef) said "we do not serve meatballs in this restaurant." Keaton asked "what do you have?" Nick started to tell what they serve. Mrs. Christy suggested them making menu for costumers to order. Children agreed that. They wanted the teacher's help to write the menu on the paper. Mrs. Christy asked them what would like to serve in your restaurant and she wrote all food lists that they want to serve. She also suggested them making price list to see how much money costumers need to pay. Nick said "like a real restaurant!" After getting the menu with price list, Nick took it and put it on the table and said "Keaton, now you can choose what you want to eat from our menu." As it should be understood from this observation notes, teacher involved right on time to make learning happening and prevented possible conflicts by directing

them in the right direction without interrupting or changing the original topic of the play. Nick's excitement was very obvious with this statement: "Like a real restaurant!"

Co-player

As a co-player, teacher participates in the children's play. He/she becomes a play partner and takes minor role. During play, he/she shows model play skills, for example: role playing, and peer interactions (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

We will present a co-player role in the following vignette:

Couple children were playing in the restaurant. The teacher walked through them and asked them about joining their play. They accepted her into their play. Mrs. Christy sat at the table and started to pretend being a customer and asked, "What is your specialty today?" Amy said "chicken soup and ice-cream." Mrs. Christy asked for menu. She said "sure! I will be right back." and grab a paper, write some letters and give it to her. While looking the menu, Mrs. Christy said "I am so hungry; your menu has lots of delicious food." Amy said "I need to go to kitchen and help William to cook." Mrs. Christy said "okay, when I am ready to order, I will let you know." She headed through stove and got some pots and plastic foods. William was trying to make toast by using toaster. Mrs. Christy said "okay, I am ready to order now; I want to eat chicken nuggets with vegetable please!" William asked "How about drink?" Mrs. Christy said "orange juice, please." Amy said "Sorry! We do not have any orange juice left. Do you want to drink milk?" Mrs. Christy said "Okay...Then Amy brought a plastic plate, spoon, and fork: put a plastic chicken, a broccoli and a carrot in the plate and gave me a cup and said "Here is your meal!" Mrs. Christy said "thank you" and pretend to eat.

This observed vignette shows that how simultaneously the conversation and free play developed between the teacher and the students. To make the play's sound real, the student used her mind by giving such a quick response to the teacher's orange juice request and offered milk as an alternative. This also indicates that how important a role of play to develop social and intellectual skills of children.

Play Leader

Adult/teacher joins and actively participates in children's play, and her/his role is to enrich and extend the play. "Teacher gives direct suggestions or an explicit demonstration of how to carry out a particular pretend act or type of social interaction" (Griffing, 1982, p. 44).

According to Johnson, Christie, & Wardle (2005, p.273) "adults often switch to this role when children have difficulty getting play started on their own or when an ongoing play episode is beginning to falter."

I would like to give following example of how the teacher intervened with a couple of preschool children who were acting out in the castle as an example to give an idea about when a teacher's involvement necessary to prevent lose of students' interest.

Nathaniel and Madeline were pretending being Quinn and King. They decided to have a baby. Madeline got a baby doll and they started to feed and dress-up the baby. The teacher (Mrs. Christy) was in the play as Quinn's sister. After a while Josie, Ashley, and Umang joined the play. They were began to lose their interest and the teacher tried to extend the play.

Mrs. Christy: "I got news from King's servant. Tomorrow is princess's birthday. She is too sad, because she thinks everybody forgot her birthday".

Nathaniel (king): "Oh! No! We need to make her happy."

Madeline (Quinn): "Let's have a party!"

Mrs. Christy: "Okay. What do we need to do? We do not have enough time to get ready for party."

Ashley: "There are lots of things to do before the party".

Mrs. Christy: "I think, we need to clean up and decorate the castle, cook birthday cake, invite people to the party. Let's start! Who is going to help the clean up?"

Josie: "I can clean- up our castle."

Ashley: "I know how to make cake, I want to make a big birthday cake for princess. She is now 5 years old, I put 5 candles on it."

Umang: "I want to write note for everybody so they can come to party."

The play continued as children started to get ready for birthday party. Through intervention, the teacher extended existing play and kept children's interest alive.

Precarious Roles

Uninvolved

If teachers do not pay attention children's play and do not support their play, children cannot engage in play. Why do teachers not involve children's play? I want to give couple reasons from my own experiences. As teachers, sometimes we cannot find time to play with children, because of our other duties. (Completing worksheets, prepare activities, talking with parent or others, etc.). Our beliefs about play are also important. If teachers believe that play is not important on child's development and learning, they can see adult participating as an interruption.

We also observed that, when teachers do not pay attention to children's play, they engage functional or non-play activities. For instance, children also choose media images (superhero roles) which have war and violence content. They also can show some aggression play behaviors. The following case can be given us a good example about causes of uninvolved play:

Through observations and interviews with the teacher, we found out that Nathaniel has difficulty playing with others. He needs extra super vision. One day, the teachers (Mrs. Christy and Mrs. Maya-second teacher in the classroom) were at the gym. After doing some exercise, the teachers let the children play with balls. Then the teachers started a conversation to each other about upcoming events and activities. Couple times Mrs. Christy noticed that Nathaniel was having hard time playing with others and she verbally warned him several times and continue her conversation with the other teacher. After a while, Mrs. Christy saw Caroline crying. Caroline told the teacher that Nathaniel pushed her. After talking with Nathaniel about his behavior, Mrs. Christy asked him whether he wants to play basketball with her. He accepted teacher's offer, then they started to play basketball. Keaton also came and joined them.

This case shows that when teachers play with children (especially with the ones who has issues to control his/her behaviors and gives hard times to his/her environment), the children stay away from misbehaving in play activities. Teachers should show children that how their play is important by paying attention to children's play.

Director/ Redirector

In both roles; teachers take over the control of play. At that time teacher intervention disrupt children's play. "When teachers take on the role of director, they remain on the sidelines and tell children what to do while playing, whereas instructors use questioning to redirect children's attention toward academic content" (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999, p.214).

One of the case studies that Mrs. Christy discussed in the class, "making play money", can be given as an example for the redirector role (Brown & Marchant, 2002). In this case study children were pretending to go shopping and decided to use rectangular blocks as money. Then Mrs. Christy suggested them to show how to make play money. She interrupted children's play

and changed the pretend play to fine-motor art activity. Although with this activity, children practiced their writing, fine –motor and cognitive skills as cutting papers, writing numbers even drawing president’s picture, the interruption was not necessary. Because the children decided on their role and they were socially engaged. By this way, they were using their imagination and they were happy. However, when they were removed from their pretend play, they lost using their imagination opportunity. If play is not child initiated, children do not enjoy with their play and can not develop their creativity.

CONCLUSIONS

Students learn and think in different ways and play is one of the natural ways of learning for all children. Different theories by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner have emphasized on various ways by which a child can learn during the initial stage of his or her live. As it is emphasized that play is a part of real life and is a very important learning process for children. Whether a child has a certain intention or not; whether the play is done on a regular basis or not, in any circumstance, if play takes place in voluntarily and willingly, this could provide his or her physical, mental emotional, linguistic and social development (Dönmez, 1992).

Play is one of the finest and natural educational endeavors about social, physical and cognitive development of a child. Using materials and setting up connections with other children, they learn how to control themselves and their environment besides learning how to control their sense of competition and enjoyment. Playing a game is a way to guide children who has only the basic knowledge about the world in his/her childhood period. This knowledge open them a way to the language, art, social science, mathematics and physics they will learn (Korkmaz, 2010; Ünal, 2009). “When child plays games with his or her friends the child learns the basic rules such as sharing, helping, respecting to the others’ rights, and taking responsibility. When child plays games which require physical power such as jumping, running, leaping, climbing, crawling, it also increases taking oxygen, the circulation of the blood and carrying food to the tissues, besides it helps the systems, such as circulation, respiration, digestion and excretion, work regularly” (Ünal, 2009, p.1). Therefore, findings of this study go parallel and support the literature that play serves an important process for promoting children’s learning and development (Kendrick, 2005; Lohfdahl, 2005; Rowe, 1998). Play also enhances emotional, intellectual, physical, and social skills of the child in ways that cannot be taught through formal classroom instruction.

The involvement of the teacher in a child’s play during the early years can be useful in laying a solid foundation for the child As a conclusion, rather than discussing whether a teacher should involve or not, meaningful discussion must be developed regarding what degree of involvement is necessary as well as how and under what conditions this involvement should be placed. As it is supported through the literature review and as the finding of this case study shows that teachers should be a model and a demonstrator instead of intervening the play by direct instruction. To give ideas about how teachers can be a model is discussed in this study at length. These ideas can assist teachers in using the teaching process for the betterment of the students at cognitive, emotional and social level.

As educators and researchers, we firmly believe that, teachers need to foster productive play through providing enough time, creating safe indoor and out door environment. They also need to build new experiences to extend and enrich ideas for play as well as observing children before intervention. Teachers must be careful not to be too intrusive in children’s play to help them to develop their inventiveness and creativity skills.

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Çocukların Oyun ve Sosyal Etkileşiminde Öğretmen Katılımının Yeri ve Önemi

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Öz: Oyun, çocukların öğrenme ve gelişimini sağlamasının yanı sıra çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal becerilerinin gelişmesine ilişkin önemli bir rol oynar. Gerek okul içinde gerekse okul dışında farkında olunsun ya da olunmasın çocuğun isteyerek ve hoşlanarak yer aldığı oyunlar, fiziksel, bilişsel, dilsel, duygusal ve sosyal gelişimin temeli olan, gerçek hayatın bir parçası ve çocuk için en etkin öğrenme sürecidir. Çocukların oyun oynaması esnasında öğretmenlerin müdahale etmesi veya katılımı, hem avantajları hem de dezavantajları nedeniyle tartışmalı bir konu olmuştur. Öğretmenin katılımı çocukların zihinsel ve sosyal becerilerinin gelişimini sağlamakla birlikte, eğer bu katılım aşırı yapılandırılmacı bir müdahaleye dönüşür ve kontrolü tamamen ele geçirme boyutuna ulaşırsa bu durum oyunun doğal akışını bozabilir ve çocuklardaki bilişsel faaliyetlerin gelişimini engelleyebilir. Bu nedenle, nitel bir araştırma yöntemi izlenen bu çalışmada, bir öğretmenin oyun aracılığı ile çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal becerilerinin geliştirilebilmesi için en etkili bir biçimde ne zaman ve nasıl bir katılımının olması gerektiği derinlemesine incelenerek ele alınmıştır. İncelenen alan literatürü ve bu araştırmanın bulguları göstermektedir ki öğretmenlerin, çocukların oyunlarına direk müdahale etmeleri onların zihinsel, duygusal ve bilişsel gelişimini olumsuz etkileyebilmektedir. Bu nedenle direk müdahalenin yerine bu araştırma öğretmenlerin bir model olmaları gerektiğini de ortaya koymaktadır. Etkili bir model olabilmesi için öğretmenlerin nelere dikkat etmeleri gerektiği ve hangi durumlarda nasıl bir katılımın faydalı olabileceği bu nitel çalışmada verilen somut örnekler ile ortaya konulmuştur. Bu araştırma teorisinin yanı sıra öğretmenlere pratikte uygulayabilecekleri fikirler sağlaması açısından da önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Oyun, eğitim, çocuk gelişimi, sosyalleşme, öğretmen katılımı

ÖZET

Amaç ve önem: Oyun, çocukların öğrenme ve gelişimini sağlamasının yanı sıra sınıflarda verilen formal öğretimin dışında ders dışı yollarla çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal becerilerinin gelişmesine ilişkin önemli bir rol oynar. Çocukların oyun oynaması esnasında öğretmenlerin müdahale etmesi veya katılımı, hem avantajları hem de dezavantajları nedeniyle tartışmalı bir konu olmuştur. Öğretmenin katılımı çocukların zihinsel ve sosyal becerilerinin gelişimini sağlamakla birlikte, eğer bu katılım aşırı yapılandırılmacı bir müdahaleye dönüşür ve kontrolü tamamen ele geçirme boyutuna ulaşırsa bu durum oyunun doğal akışını bozabilir ve çocuklardaki bilişsel faaliyetlerin gelişimini engelleyebilir. Bu çalışmada bir öğretmenin oyun aracılığı ile çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal becerilerinin geliştirilebilmesi için etkin bir biçimde ne zaman, nasıl ve ne şekilde bir katılımının olması gerektiği derinlemesine incelenerek ele alınmıştır. Bu araştırma teorisinin yanı sıra öğretmenlere pratikte uygulayabilecekleri fikirler sağlaması açısından önem taşımaktadır.

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Yöntem: Bu çalışma bir vaka analizi şeklinde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin orta eyaletlerinden birisinde bir üniversitenin kampüsünde bulunan bir araştırma okulunda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu okulda çalışan öğretmenler ile yapılan yüz yüze görüşmeler ve yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat, 50-60 dakikalık toplam yedi adet ders gözlemi, öğretmenlerin kullandıkları dokümanlar, dersliklerden toplanan materyallere ve özellikle bir öğretmenle yapılan mülakatlara dayanarak elde edilen veriler nitel bir araştırma yöntemi izlenerek analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bir vaka çalışması olması, katılımcıların güvenliği ve araştırmanın bir okul üzerine olması nedeniyle katılımcıların gerçek isimleri değiştirilmiştir. Uzunca süredir devam eden tartışmalara neden olan bu konunun nitel bir yöntemle analiz edilebilmesi için şu sorulara cevaplar aranmıştır: Öğretmenler çocukların oyununa katılmalı mıdır? Oyun alanları ve sınıf düzeni nasıl ayarlanmalı ve döşenmelidir? Öğretmenlerin katılımı ne şekildedir veya ne tür katılımlar gerçekleştirilmelidir? Bu katılımların olumlu ve olumsuz yönleri nelerdir? Eğer bu katılım gerekli ise ne zaman ve ne şekilde bir katılım sağlanmalıdır?

Bulgular: Bu araştırmanın bulguları göstermektedir ki öğretmenlerin, çocukların oyunlarına direkt müdahale etmeleri onların zihinsel, duygusal ve bilişsel gelişimini olumsuz etkileyebilmektedir. Bu nedenle direkt müdahalenin yerine bu araştırma öğretmenlerin bir model olmaları gerektiğini de ortaya koymaktadır. Etkili bir model olabilmesi için öğretmenlerin nelere dikkat etmeleri gerektiği ve hangi durumlarda nasıl bir katılımın faydalı olabileceği bu nitel çalışmada verilen somut örnekler ile ortaya konulmuştur.

Tartışma ve Sonuç: Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre araştırmacıların çocukların oyun esnasında öğretmenlerin katılımının gerekli olup olmadığını tartışmak yerine, bu katılımın derecesinin veya boyutlarının ne kadar olması gerektiğinin tartışılması daha fazla anlam ifade etmektedir. Bu araştırmanın bulgular kısmında da hangi tür durumlarda ne tür bir katılımın olmasının fayda sağlayacağı ortaya konulmuştur.