

Using Play as a Curricular Tool in Pre-Primary Classrooms: Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Ghana

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n1p247

Abstract

Although teachers in pre-primary settings may have positive views about using play as a method of teaching and learning in their classrooms, these views cannot be effectively implemented if they do not receive the necessary support and resources. This study explored challenges pre-primary teachers encountered as they utilized play as a curricular tool in school/educational settings in Ghana. Data for this study was gathered from 221 pre-primary school teachers via open-ended questions included in a questionnaire. Using keyword analysis, themes were derived from participants' statements and the most illustrative excerpts were extracted. The findings of this study indicated that while the teachers in this study did use play in their classrooms, they encountered challenges, which related to classroom management, complaints from school directors/head teachers and other teachers, pressure from parents, and lack of resources. Implications for practice and research are discussed.

Keywords: Children, Ghana, Play, Pre-primary, Teachers, Learning, Development.

1. Introduction and Background

Play is a cherished activity, especially during childhood. As a result, children spend considerable hours playing. It is an activity children do best at home and in educational settings, when given the opportunity. Play is important for children's learning and development because it enhances their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being (Bergen, 1998; Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004; Ginsburg, 2007; UNESCO, 2007). As children master their world, play assists them to develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and resiliency they will need in order to overcome future challenges (Band & Weisz, 1988; Erickson, 1985; Ginsburg; Hurwitz, 2002). Additionally, Bruner (1974) opined that children's symbolic play is a cognitively valuable occupation because such play allows them to practice the skills required in later life. The ability to pretend at a young age is a sign of early competence in understanding mental states (Davis, Woolley & Bruell, 2002).

Even though considerable research has explored play's developmental potential in the early years (Howard, Jenvey, & Hill, 2006), over the years, play has been reduced or eliminated from some early childhood classrooms in most countries, including Ghana (Fromberg, 2006; Frost, 2003; Miller & Almon, 2009; Ofosu-Appiah, 2008). For instance, the press for academic readiness through concentrated and direct teaching of alphabets, numbers, colors, and other skills is now affecting the amount of time assigned for play in preschools (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2004). In school settings, different types of play promote children's learning and development across different domains (Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004; Lloyd & Howe, 2003; Moon & Reifel, 2008; Ranz-Smith, 2007). However, this will not be possible if teachers do not use play as a curricular tool in their classrooms or if they have beliefs that are contrary to this view.

In contemporary society, play has been undervalued in pre-primary schools because the goals of learning in these settings have been defined narrowly in terms of mastering a set of basic academic

skills (Bergen, 1998; Frost & Norquist, 2007; Ofori-Appiah, 2008). In this regard, most teachers find it difficult to incorporate play in their classrooms. This is complicated by the fact that there seems to be little consensus on the definition or categorization of play (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Takhvar & Smith, 1990) and as a result, professionals who work with children have found it difficult to follow, understand, and encapsulate children's play (Hyder, 2005). Additionally, since most teachers may not have adequate or the necessary skills and information to draft appropriate plans for children during play (Muro, Petty, & Dako-Gyeke, 2006), there seems to be a disparity between what scholars in the field would like teachers to do and what teachers actually do in school settings (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Sabbi, Boateng, & Hammond, 2010).

Teachers will not utilize play effectively for children's learning and development if they (a) are not aware of children's needs, (b) do not know when and how to match play materials and activities with children's interests, and (c) do not know when to provide children with new materials, props, or ideas to move children's play toward a more challenging and satisfying level (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2000; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Ceglowski (1997), in developing daily schedules, early childhood teachers operationalize how their viewpoints are enacted in their various programs. Despite the fact that teachers may assign time for play in their lesson plans, playtime may not be routinely built into the program (Ceglowski) because teachers generally hold diverse viewpoints about teaching; one that is child-centered and another that is teacher-directed (Wein, 1995).

Most often, early childhood teachers set up appropriate, stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not follow up with guidance, scaffolding, or supportive, responsive interactions with the children as they play (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Kontos, 1999). These authors describe this as the early childhood error. Some teachers find it difficult to participate in children's play for fear of disrupting the flow of children's play activities. Tamburrini (1982) argued that while elaborative interaction can support children's play behavior, directions from teachers might devalue free play as a learning activity. Ashiabi (2007) suggests that teachers have to observe what children are doing, support their efforts, and participate thoughtfully in order to promote additional learning. Thus, teachers can take part in children's play activities by being sensitive to children's needs. Enz and Christie (1994) assert that if teachers interact with children during play, they would be able to enhance and manage children's play by matching children's play styles with their play activities.

The Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (2004) states that children learn best through play and in that regard the pre-primary curriculum should emphasize the play-way method. Accordingly, some efforts have been made to ensure that schools are safe and equipped with toys for children's learning and development (Ghana Education Service, 2001, 2004; UNESCO, 2006, 2010). Additionally, teachers are expected to plan activities such as role-plays, sports and games that strengthen children's health and the process of socialization (UNESCO, 2006). Also, to improve the quality of early childhood education in Ghana, the Government has set up a National Nursery Teachers' Training Centre where certified teachers and teacher assistants who want to specialize in pre-primary education are trained. In addition, the University of Education, Winneba and the University of Cape Coast, both in Ghana, offer four-year Degree programs in Early Childhood Care and Development. All these three early childhood and development training programs emphasize child-centered play-based approaches in their curricular.

While previous studies have examined the educational system in Ghana, there seems to be a paucity of studies that have explored challenges teachers encounter in pre-primary classrooms. This study which is drawn from a larger project goes beyond current research to examine challenges Ghanaian pre-primary teachers encountered as they utilized play as a method of teaching to enhance children's learning and development in educational settings. Given that preschool and kindergarten teachers are responsible for offering play leadership in classrooms (Jacobs, 1999; UNESCO, 2006), their views are very important. Additionally, Ghanaian pre-primary teachers' views are of great benefit because they are on the front lines and have the primary responsibility of organizing children's learning environments.

Furthermore, pre-primary teachers' opinions are important because their experiences differ since each school context is different. Moreover, a number of pre-primary programs in Ghana are unable to engage preschoolers in play activities because play facilities are not available (Sabbi et al., 2010). Also, the Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (2004) notes that most pre-primary schools in Ghana lack recreational facilities, play materials and good physical infrastructure. Additionally, while pre-primary schools in Ghana are expected to cater for children between ages three to five years, the age limits are not strictly observed because children of all ages could be found in these educational settings (Ghana Education Service, 2001, 2004; UNESCO, 2006, 2010). In such circumstances, the older children may tend to dominate the younger children during play activities.

The school context either nurtures or stifles teachers' motivation to use play because it determines the extent to which teachers provide children opportunities to play. In pre-primary educational settings, although teachers directly influence how children play, what they play with, how much they play, and the ways they play with each other are equally important. Since teachers are the first responders when children face challenges during play, it seems reasonable to explore their views. Moreover, teachers' views are essential because they can provide valuable information that could be (a) utilized to enhance children's learning experiences in pre-primary educational settings and (b) considered when reviewing preschool and kindergarten programs in Ghana.

2. Research Methods

A descriptive survey design was employed to explore challenges pre-primary teachers encountered using play as a curricular tool in early childhood classrooms in Ghana. Two hundred and twenty-one (110 preschool and 111 kindergarten) teachers were recruited through a convenience sampling method as participants for the study. The convenience sampling method was appropriate for this study because it permitted the researcher to analyze a subset of a larger population (Babbie, 2001). The respondents who voluntarily participated in this study were preschool and kindergarten teachers from various regions in Ghana and had been working with children (ages 3-5) for a minimum of one year.

In order to collect data for this study, participants responded to open-ended questions included in a questionnaire which was administered to the teachers in two waves, after their consent had been sought. Questions concerning problems associated with the use of play as an instructional method were asked, for example: "Have you encountered any problems using play as a method of teaching in your classroom?" Participants were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to the question and explain further the problems they had encountered using play in their classrooms. The open-ended format was useful because it allowed participants to express themselves in ways that were consistent with their authentic responses (Babbie, 2001). Additionally, it permitted participants to freely respond to questions in much greater depth and in their own words (Best & Kahn, 1989).

In the first wave of data collection, participants were preschool and kindergarten teachers attending professional development training programs in the Greater Accra and Central Regions of Ghana. Voluntary participants were given consent forms to read and sign prior to completing the surveys. A total of 113 participants (60 preschool and 53 kindergarten teachers) completed and returned the consent forms and questionnaires from a pool of 115 teachers, yielding a 98% participation rate. The participation rate was high because the majority of respondents returned their completed questionnaires the same day and the others returned their completed questionnaires a day after the questionnaires were distributed.

The second wave of data collection occurred two weeks later and consisted of participants who did not participate in the professional training programs, but were from selected early childhood educational institutions. Each voluntary participant was given a questionnaire packet that included a consent form and survey. Participants completed and returned both forms within a period of four days. A total of 108 participants (50 preschool and 58 kindergarten teachers) completed and returned the questionnaires from a pool of 120 teachers, yielding a 90% participation rate.

The data analysis followed the same sequence as the data collection procedures. The researcher read and reviewed participants' responses thoroughly and repeatedly. The researcher derived themes

from participants' statements and associated codes with significant statements since most of the responses were brief (one to three lines). A matrix was developed to visually display participant's written statements according to the themes and the most illustrative excerpts were extracted. In order to enhance the credibility of the results, a second researcher used the same coding process and the results were compared to identify coding similarities and differences. The coding decisions of both researchers were discussed and corresponding modifications were made until sufficient inter-coder agreement was attained and a final dataset was generated.

3. Findings

Participants were asked about the number of children in their classrooms and 71 preschool teachers (68.9%) and 87 kindergarten teachers (82.1%) reported they had 21+ children in their classrooms. Although, they were not specific about the number of teachers, some of the participants indicated that there were more than one teacher in their classrooms. Regarding the challenges encountered by teachers as they used play for teaching and learning in their classrooms, 56.9% of the participants indicated that they faced diverse challenges and the rest of the respondents indicated that they did not face any challenge. The respondents stated the types of difficulties they had encountered and based on their responses, the following four themes were derived (a) classroom management, (b) complaints from school directors/head teachers and other teachers, (c) pressure from parents, and (d) lack of resources.

Managing Children in Classrooms

Classroom management issues included children's behavior as identified by preschool and kindergarten teachers. Participants had concerns about children fighting over play materials, bullying, and children's desire to play without ceasing. Additionally, participants indicated that due to large class sizes and children's age limits not being strictly observed classroom management was difficult because children used a lot of time transitioning from play to other activities, which distorted their class schedules. Sample statements from participants' responses were:

"...the children are many, everyday they fight over toys during play, especially the boys.... I do not know if the fighting is part of play...because I cannot attend to all of them at the same time, it is difficult."

" ... having a lot of children in the class, I spend a lot of time watching over them so that they do not hurt each other ... always the older children run around in the classroom and do not allow the younger children any space to enjoy play ..."

"... the children get carried away when playing ... enjoy the fun part of play than the learning part of it... will not listen to the teacher ... always want to do their own thing."

"Since some children in my classroom are above the preschool age, the older children become too rowdy and uncontrollable ... this makes it difficult for the younger ones because they are scared to play with the older children ..."

"...the children who are above the preschool age control the few toys available... this is sad because the teacher cannot do much since the play materials are not sufficient and the classroom is not spacious."

Many of the benefits of play may not be realized if teachers have difficulty managing children during play. As Howes and Smith (1995) argued, the quality of the classroom hinders the construction of quality teacher-child relationships during play because a poorly equipped, crowded, and understaffed

classroom will limit play activities available to both teachers and children. According to Sabbi et al (2010), some pre-primary programs in Ghana are unable to engage preschool children in play activities because play facilities are not available. In their study on symbolic play in preschool settings, Umek and Musek (2001) proposed that the level and complexity of children's symbolic play depends on their play environment. Since this type of play involves various sign systems including talk, gesture and objects (Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Rowe, 1998), as found in this study, children may have limited opportunities to represent their ideas during symbolic play since they were many in the classrooms and the children who were older, controlled the available toys. Also, when children keep fighting over toys during play, teachers may spend a great deal of time resolving conflicts and may not be able to interact and develop children's interests.

Complaints from School Directors/Head Teachers and Other Teachers

In this study, another challenge to using play as a curricular tool in preschool and kindergarten classrooms was complaints from some teachers and school directors/head teachers. Participants indicated that criticisms by colleagues and directors influenced the extent and how often play was used in their classroom. According to the respondents, although teachers were in charge of classrooms activities, directors evaluated their lesson plans. In their responses, some of the participants stated:

"... my head teacher did not understand why the play method should be used ... she was concerned that children will inform their parents that they only play at school and the parents will not be happy."

"... Ghanaian parents want their children to be the best so this brings about a lot of competition in the preschool system ... head teachers therefore make sure there is no play when children come to school ... only academic learning, learning, and learning..."

"My head teacher said children play at home, so when they come to school, we have to make sure they learn... sometimes she thinks I do not want to teach the children when she finds the children playing, especially in the classroom..."

"... teachers in other classrooms always complain that the children in my class are disturbing their classes... how can children be quiet when they are many and are playing?"

"... children make noise when they are playing, especially if they are many in the classroom and are excited ... I find it difficult to interact with them or calm them down during play."

While teachers made decisions regarding activities children in their classrooms engaged in, complaints from school directors/head teachers and other teachers discouraged pre-primary teachers from using play in their classrooms. Since in most pre-primary schools there is emphasis on academic readiness through concentrated and direct teaching of alphabets, numbers, colors, and other skills, there is limited time for play (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2004). Accordingly, as seen in the responses by participants, some teachers and school directors/head teachers regarded play as an activity appropriate for home and not in educational settings. As major stakeholders, their complaints influenced the extent to which pre-primary teachers used play as a method of teaching and learning.

Pressure from Parents

Respondents also stated that most parents disliked the use of play by teachers as instructional tool in pre-primary classrooms. They indicated in their responses that some parents complained because they preferred early childhood programs that were academic focused. Complaints stated by participants included the following:

"... parents complain because they believe preschool is for children to learn not to play."

"Some parents threatened to withdraw their children from the school ... children should be engaged in academic learning when they come to school ..."

Children play a lot at home ... teachers are to teach children how to read and write not to play with them..."

"... most parents complain about children playing in school ... this is difficult because I don't want to get into trouble with them ... they do not expect children to play when they come to school..."

"... a parent said that it is not good for children to play and that they want their children who are two years old or below to learn how to read and write than to play when they come to school ... they think school is for academic learning only."

"... some parents complain a lot if their children get hurt during play in school ... even if it is a small bruise..."

"... when children fight over toys, they inform their parents when they go home and parents complain that their children are being bullied by other children ... it is difficult dealing with some parents..."

"... a parent said that school fees is becoming expensive so when her child comes to school, he has to learn academic stuff ... how can I pay money for my child to play in school? ... my child plays a lot at home."

Given that parents are major stakeholders in school settings, especially pre-primary schools (Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004), their concerns cannot be ignored. Soler and Miller (2003) argue that parents, teachers, researchers and politicians often have entrenched and conflicting views about what is right for young children. Thus, curricula could become avenues of struggle between stakeholders' ideas regarding early childhood education and the appropriate content and contexts for learning and development (Soler & Miller). Due to the emphasis on academic learning in most Ghanaian preschools (Ofosu-Appiah, 2008), the majority of parents may not support the use of play in school settings, even at the preschool level. As a result, play is no longer the cornerstone of early childhood programs in Ghana as it used to be some decades ago.

Lack of Resources

Participants also identified inadequate resources as a concern associated with using play in preschool and kindergarten programs. Participants made mention of insufficient play materials, limited space due to large numbers of children in their classrooms, and limited noise permitted in attempt not to disturb other activities in the schools. Some of the statements were:

"... we do not have enough toys and spacious play areas ... children always fight over play materials and play areas... in the process, some of them, especially the younger ones get hurt and cry a lot."

"... there are certain toys that all the children want to play with everyday... children tend to fight always over those toys ... when parents walk in and see these children crying... they think we do not take good care of the children... they ask a lot of questions."

"... children don't have patience in taking turns because of lack of sufficient play objects... all the children do not get their turns to play with their favorite toys during play time ... children cannot play throughout the day."

"... a lot of the toys children play with are broken so they fight over the few good toys... a lot of the broken toys need to be thrown away, but because we do not have enough, it is difficult to do that ..."

"... because we do not have enough toys, some children bring toys from home to school and do not want to share with other children...I am always concerned because when these toys get broken...parents will complain ..."

"... our classrooms are not spacious and the children are too many for all of them to get involved and participate fully in play... it is very difficult to observe the children and interact with them during play."

Resources in the form of play objects, space and time are very important in pre-primary classrooms because the level and type of children's play depend mostly on the availability of these resources. According to Jacobs (1999) and Ghana Education Service (2001, 2004), teachers are responsible for providing play leadership in schools and this means offering (a) favorable conditions in which children learn with delight and ease and (b) time, space, materials, and accessibility for creative and meaningful play. Thus, inadequate play materials could make teachers work tedious and also prevent children from benefiting from play activities in school settings. In his writings, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that children use play objects or pivots to create zones of proximal development.

With regard to time, Frost and colleagues (2005) argued that if more time is assigned to play, children can explore in-depth whatever meanings are to be developed during play because they will be able to create meaningful pretend frames. As play in its varied forms is a serious business for children (Cheah, Nelson & Rubin, 2001; Craig & Dunn, 2007) children's healthy development depends on sufficient time, space and opportunity to play (International Play Association, 2008). It is only when teachers allot ample time and space for children's play that they can engage in receptive interactions with children as they play.

4. Discussion of the Findings

The number of children in a classroom, available toys and space influence the type and amount of time teachers assign for play in pre-primary classrooms. Even though preschool and kindergarten teachers may express positive views about the use of play as a curricular tool in classrooms, these views may not be implemented in their respective classrooms, especially if they encounter challenges. Spodek and Saracho (1998) suggest that for children's play to be valuable, teachers must (a) offer a supportive environment with sufficient play areas, materials, and equipment; (b) foster positive social interactions; and (c) make children's play more productive.

Teachers in this study indicated that they had encountered diverse problems using play in their classrooms. The respondents identified classroom management, complaints from school directors/head teachers and other teachers, pressure from parents, and lack of resources as challenges they encountered using play as a curricular tool. In discussing challenges to the implementation of play in early childhood classrooms, scholars have identified (a) attitudinal, (b) structural, and (c) functional barriers (Ashiabi, 2007; Kagan, 1990; Olsen & Sumsion, 2000). It was not surprising that classroom management surfaced as one of the problems pre-primary teachers encountered when they used play as a curricular tool because handling many young children, including those above the preschool age without enough toys and space could be very difficult.

During play, teachers may spend time resolving conflicts as children fight over inadequate toys at the disadvantage of the younger children in the classrooms. Whereas pre-primary schools in

Ghana normally enroll children who range in ages from three to five years, the age limits are not strictly observed because children of all ages could be found in preschool and kindergarten classrooms (Ghana Education Service, 2001, 2004; UNESCO, 2006, 2010). DeVries (2001) recommends that when conflicts occur during play, teachers can intervene to facilitate children's resolutions and self-regulation by encouraging them to listen to each other and ensure that they all agree to a resolution. However, this may be difficult to achieve when children fight over few toys and there is not much time for every child to have his or her turn.

As stated in the Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (2004), most pre-primary schools in Ghana lack recreational facilities and play materials. Consequently, pre-primary children may not benefit much from play because for most of them, toys are very important during play. Many play scholars and research studies (e.g., Frost et al., 2005; Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy; Isenberg & Jolongo, 2000; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Sabbi, 2010) argue that early exposure to appropriate play activities and materials is very important and provides a sound basis for learning and development.

No matter what their beliefs are, pre-primary teachers have to consider the views of key stakeholders since they can validate or challenge the use of play in schools. Many play researchers (e.g. Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Takhvar & Smith, 1990) contend that lack of consensus on the definition or categorization of play contributes to the conflict about the importance of play in children's learning and development. With the emphasis on academic learning in many early childhood settings, educators and parents have undervalued play as a curricular tool (Bergen, 1998; Bondioli, 2001). There is therefore the need for teachers to assume the responsibility of educating stakeholders, particularly parents about the benefits of play in school settings. Most importantly, parents and other stakeholders must be encouraged to understand that a curriculum that integrates play, strengthens and supports children's learning and development (Addison, n. d.; Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Sabbi et al., 2010; UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2007).

Once stakeholders become convinced that play enhances children's learning and development, it is likely they will support teachers to utilize play in classrooms, particularly at the pre-primary level. Furthermore, in order to overcome some of the challenges pre-primary teachers in this study encountered using play as a method of teaching and learning, teachers must be knowledgeable about play research and typical characteristics that illustrate how play enhances children's learning and development across domains (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). From such knowledge base, teachers will be able to advocate and make appropriate decisions about providing sufficient opportunities and time for all children to play in early childhood educational settings (Christie, 2001; Frost et al., 2005; Isenberg & Quisenberry; Wolery & MacWilliams, 1998).

Children benefit most from play if they are given enough time to engage in activities of their choice. Also, teachers need enough time to engage in play activities with children (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kontos, 1999). Children's play becomes more challenging and they are able to stay focused for longer periods when their teachers are involved in the play activities (Hutt, Tyler, Hutt, & Christopherson, 1989; Sylva, Bruner & Genova, 1976). Kowalski and colleagues (2004) noted that adults who engage in symbolic play with children demonstrate stage manager, co-player, and play leader behaviors, which have been recognized as teacher-play interaction styles that are very supportive of children's play. Regardless of how useful these play interaction styles are, teachers cannot play these roles effectively if they are not given the needed support and resources, such as enough time, toys and spacious classrooms (Ghana Education Service, 2001, 2004; Sabbi et al., 2010; UNESCO, 2006).

5. Conclusions and Implications

Certainly, the findings of this study provide insight into difficulties pre-primary teachers in Ghana encountered as they made efforts to offer children opportunities to learn through play in school settings. It was clear from the findings that the teachers encountered challenges regarding managing

children, lack of resources, as well as criticisms from school directors/head teachers, other teachers and parents. These barriers are not only structural, but also functional and attitudinal (Ashiabi, 2007; Kagan, 1990; Olsen & Sumsion, 2000). Keeping in view the significance of play for children's learning and development, the findings call for an urgent need to eliminate the factors that may limit children's play activities in school settings.

Teachers need to reassess their current use of play and make conscious modifications in order to maximize the potential usefulness of play. Teacher preparation programs and continuing education for practicing teachers should place more emphasis on (a) the usefulness of play in educational settings and (b) effective classroom management techniques. This will increase teachers' potential for supporting children in classrooms, especially during play. Also, such programs would develop teachers' management competencies and skills to effectively assist children and design useful ways that will make children's learning and development more meaningful through play.

Furthermore, since inadequate resources negatively affect children's play activities, the quantity of play materials and time assigned for it should be reconsidered so that children would have opportunities to enjoy and benefit from their play activities. With the youngest of children, teachers are responsible for providing a supportive environment with sufficient play materials and space, fostering positive social interactions and lengthening children's play (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Spodek & Saracho, 1998). In reality, preschools cannot provide children with all the toys they would like to have. Therefore, the extent to which children will fight over limited toys would be minimized if at least the most useful toys are made available in classrooms and more importantly, children are taught how to share. However, it is important to emphasize that toys are most useful for children's learning and development if they are developmentally and culturally appropriate.

With regard to the complaints from parents, school directors/head teachers and teachers in other classrooms within their schools, it would be useful if schools provide more opportunities for these stakeholders and other professionals who work in the school system (administrators, social workers and counselors) to dialogue on the benefits of play for children's learning and development. Of particular importance is the need for educators to recognize the power of play to enhance children's learning and development, and plan classroom activities accordingly. While research has shown that pre-primary children learn best through play, there is no doubt that many factors influence the extent to which teachers use play in their classrooms to enhance teaching and learning. Clearly, the findings of this study underscore the relevance of appropriate interventions to support pre-primary teachers, particularly in their efforts to use play as a curricular tool in early childhood classrooms.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Dr. Lin Moore, Dr. Joyce Armstrong and Dr. Glen Jennings of Texas Woman University, Denton, Texas, for supervising the doctoral research from which this article was taken.

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