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Parental Perspectives of Play with Preschool Children

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**PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES OF PLAY WITH PRESCHOOL
CHILDREN**

By

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

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ABSTRACT

Research in child development has found that guided play can be a very effective teaching method for young children. Children obtain higher levels of play when parents have an understanding of play and its benefits to learning. This research is designed to assess how parents of children at the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Laboratory view play as a learning technique. Also, this study considered the relationship between parental opinions of play and other parenting roles. A total of 22 parents of children enrolled in the Child Development Laboratory completed the *Parent As A Teacher* (PAAT) inventory. Results showed significant positive relationships between opinions of play and other areas of parenting including creativity, teaching/learning, and frustration.

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Parental Perspectives of Play with Preschool Children

INTRODUCTION

Early education for young children serves as a preparation for formal education, and supports the development of the basic skills that help children deal with more difficult tasks such as learning to read. Research in child development has found that guided play can be a very effective teaching method for young children (See Bodrov, & Leong, 2003; NAEYC, 1996; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has recognized the research on play and has sought to encourage its implementation in preschool and early childhood programs through their standard Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

Parents play an important part in preparing their children for kindergarten and elementary school. They are essentially the first educators in a child's life, and can provide a supportive learning environment. Supporting children's play at home, and encouraging learning before any formal education, is just one way that parents enhance learning. When a child reaches preschool age parents select the early education program that will continue to prepare their children to succeed. Parents who understand play can recognize and support its use in the preschool classroom.

Educators and researchers realize the importance of the parental role as children are learning and developing through the early years. Both educators and parents want children to receive a quality education that fosters learning. Those teachers that include play in their curriculum know how important it is that parents understand play and the learning process.

The goal of this research is to gain insight into the perceptions that preschoolers' parents have towards play and the learning process. This research was specifically based on play in a DAP program with a strong play-based curriculum. Opinions of play were surveyed in the parents of preschoolers who attend the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab, in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Developmental Theory

The field of early childhood education has been greatly influenced by the theorists who have helped us understand how children develop. Specifically, the last 30 years has seen many changes to education as a result of the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner. Their theories of child development have helped educators understand more about how children learn. For early childhood educators, these theories have introduced new levels of knowledge about how learning is different for younger children (NAEYC, 1996; Wadsworth, 1996).

Cognitive Theory. Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory has altered education, child care, and many other fields focusing on child development. Piaget emphasized that development occurs across four stages that exist on a continuum (Wadsworth, 1996). The stages of cognitive development are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992; Wadsworth 1996). Each of these stages focus on different cognitive functions and abilities that build on one another as the child moves into the next stage of development (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). According to Wadsworth (1996), Piaget thought development flowed "... along in a cumulative manner, each new step in development built on and becoming integrated with previous steps" (p. 27).

Children in preschool are in the preoperational stage of Piaget's theory which begins around age two and ends at approximately age seven (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). This stage is characterized by large developmental increases in language and representation (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth 1996). Preoperational children are learning to represent the world in many ways including "deferred imitation, symbolic play, drawing, mental imagery, and spoken language" (Wadsworth, 1996, p. 57).

According to Piaget's theory, children learn through the direct interaction they have with the environment around them (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Using the different senses to explore objects helps children to construct meaning (Crain, 1992; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999). Piaget expounds "...the objects themselves "tell" the child what the characteristics of the object are. The feedback or reinforcement is provided by the objects themselves" (Wadsworth, 1996, p. 22). Piaget believes that learning is an active process which includes an interest to explore, experimenting with objects, cooperation, and play (Chaille & Silvern, 1996).

A child stores the information or concepts they have gained through exploration in schemas, or organized files of information (Wadsworth, 1996). For example, a child may have a schema for cats that contains information such as a cat has four legs, long whiskers, meows, etc. Children compile their schemas by exploring the environment through the process of assimilation and accommodation (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Assimilation refers to adding additional knowledge to an existing idea or schema of an object, and accommodation is the process of adjusting or creating a new category to fit new information in appropriately (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). This process helps children organize the information they have gained and allows for further development.

Many new skills and abilities appear during the preoperational stage, but some limitations in understanding still exist (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Children in the preoperational stage can have difficulty seeing more than one perspective; they focus on their immediate environment instead of past experiences or abstract ideas (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). The foundation for preoperational thought is hands-on understanding that takes place in the present making it difficult for children to deal with concepts or objects that are not in their direct surroundings (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996).

In order to create new schemas and adjust old ones children need hands-on manipulation to be able to shape their knowledge (Kostelnik et al., 1999; Wadsworth, 1996). A preoperational child also has a hard time understanding that another person's perspective can be different from their own. This inability to see more than one perspective or dimension of a situation is called egocentrism (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Children in this stage can sometimes believe that everything around them is living because they believe that everything is like them, which is referred to as animism (Crain, 1992). For example, a child who believes their stuffed animals are afraid of the dark, because the dark frightens them. Another way a young child may exhibit egocentrism is by giving their own comfort item to another friend if they think the friend is sad. An egocentric child wouldn't understand the friend wants their own comfort item. Egocentrism is a key component of children's thinking in the preoperational stage

The different stages of development in Piaget's theory do not mean that development occurs at the exact same time for every child. Instead Wadsworth (1996) tells us that Piaget's theory emphasized that development seems to occur in a somewhat consistent order. Children develop at different rates and move through the stages at their own pace, they are not all uniform in their growth (Wadsworth, 1996).

Sociocultural Theory. The Sociocultural theory of Vygotsky has helped educators better realize their own role in supporting learning and development in the classroom. Vygotsky believed that the social world of a child plays an important part in cognitive development (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Crain, 1992; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Berk & Winsler, 1995, expounded “Social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world available to individuals” (p.13). Interactions with adults, peers, teachers, and other individuals directly influence a child’s learning.

Vygotsky stressed that assessing a child’s current abilities and also those abilities that are almost developed, better represents that child’s potential (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Crain (1992) explains that the zone of proximal development “...illuminates not only those functions that have already matured, but those that are in the process of maturing” (p. 214). A child’s zone of proximal development is always being adjusted for abilities that have been achieved and those new skills that will soon develop.

Tasks that are just out of reach for a child can be learned with the help of someone who is more advanced such as a parent, teacher, or peer (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006; Crain, 1992). The process of encouraging and helping a child be able to accomplish increasingly difficult tasks is called scaffolding (Crain, 1992). In order to successfully encourage development through scaffolding, adults or peers should focus on those skills that are within a child’s zone of proximal development (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Scaffolding may include providing lots of opportunities to practice those skills that are developing or modeling how to accomplish a particular task.

Ecological Theory. The basis for Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory is the idea that development is a result of the individual and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al., 1999). It is also important to keep in mind that the environment does not

just influence the child, the child also influences the environment, it is a bi-directional (Kostelnik et al.). This theory appreciates all of the different contexts which directly and indirectly influence children.

The Ecological Systems Theory divides the environment into levels to help us better recognize how broad an impact it has on development. The levels include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The levels of this theory depend on the type of interaction they have with the child. For example, the microsystem is made up of the relationships, events, and places that directly interact with the child. The relationships between the different Microsystems make up another system, the mesosystem. For example, how parents and the child's teachers interact will affect the child. The exosystem contains the environments which don't directly involve the individual but still influence them, like a parent's job environment or the local school board. The macrosystem is formed by the greater society and includes the government structure, culture, and laws of the land. It also includes components of society such as racism, discrimination, and economic distress (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al., 1999). Later, Bronfenbrenner and other scholars came to realize that current events also change a developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al.). The element of time and cohort that have created obvious changes, are all apart of the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)

Not only does this theory help us realize the importance of the environment to a child's development, but by using these systems we can better understand how the child is feeling, how we should educated them, and what may be causing difficulties in a child's learning (Kostelnik et al., 1999). When a child seems to be struggling we can use knowledge of the different contexts to

figure out the source of the problem. This information can help educators better individualize their curriculum to meet the needs of the children in their classes.

Play

Child development theories have greatly impacted and influenced how early childhood educators define the importance of play. Play is a crucial activity for all children, and can be a very natural and effective learning vehicle if educators are able to realize its potential and strive to provide quality activities. Early childhood education that is age appropriate should recognize and reflect the different learning processes of young children. Play provides all of the necessary components for an effective learning process in early childhood (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988).

Theoretical Support. Play combines many of the activities that theorists believe increase development. Play is essential for a developing child and provides constant learning and growing experiences (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Piaget emphasized how children in the preoperational stage of development learn best through hands-on manipulation; play allows children to manipulate objects and the environment directly around them (Chaille & Silvern, 1996; Elkind, 1987; Golinkoff et al.; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988; Williams & Kamii, 1986). Elkind, 1987, stated “Young children are natural learners, their curiosity and desire to make sense of their world lead to spontaneous, self-directed learning” (p.14). Play fits under Piaget’s term of active education, because it is interesting and fun for children, and it fosters cooperation and exploration (Chaille & Silvern, 1996).

When children become more advanced and start engaging in pretend play they are developing the ability to deal with concepts and objects that are not in their immediate physical environment. They are gaining the ability to think about things abstractly and use mental representations (Bodrov & Leong, 2003; Chaille & Silvern, 1996; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). As

stated before, the ability to represent objects is important as children are learning to read and write (NAEYC, 1996; Wadsworth, 1996).

Elkind (1987) explains that there is less interest in learning when the learning is not directed by the child. He further states that adult-directed learning may cause children to "...become dependent on adults to direct all their activity, afraid to take initiative" (p.14). In opposition to adult-directed learning, play is driven by a child's intrinsic motivation to learn and fosters creativity and problem solving (NAEYC, 1987; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Also by offering choices or self-selected play activities in the classroom, educators are allowing children to set their own individual learning rate and decrease the risk of pressuring them beyond their ability (NAEYC, 1987). Educators also encourage a love of learning in children by providing many interesting activities that will allow them to explore and experiment within their natural environment (NAEYC, 1987).

The socialcultural theories of Vygotsky also support play as being an activity in which children are encouraged to move above their current cognitive level. Vygotsky as quoted by Berk (1994) stated:

Play creates a zone of proximal development in the child. In play, the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development (p. 31).

His research emphasized that young children need to be encouraged to improve on the skills that they have not yet accomplished (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Through play children receive the

scaffolding from adults and peers which Vygotsky theorized increases development by guiding children to accomplish more difficult tasks (Berk, 1994; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory provides an understanding of why the environment has such an impact on children's growth and their even play behaviors. Children base some pretend situations on actual situations or experiences they have witnessed (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). A child that has recently been to the zoo may recreate that experience by pretending to go to the zoo with their friends. Pretend play gives children the opportunity to imitate and learn different roles (Berk et al.; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Elements of the macrosystem also influence play. For example, children from a low social economic status engage less in pretend play from children from a higher status (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988)

Types of Play. As children grow their play changes and reaches higher levels of difficulty. Rogers & Sawyers (1988) tell us that there are three types of play including: practice play, symbolic play, and games with rules. Each of these types of play has different functions, and benefits. Children engage in practice play to practice their skills and improve on those abilities that they have already accomplished (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). New skills are founded on those abilities that have been previously developed and refined through practice play (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). During the ages of two and seven, children engage more frequently in play that involves mental representations (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Symbolic or pretend play is founded on representations, where children use one object to symbolize another (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Like when a child plays with a bundle of fabric like it was a baby. This type of play becomes more complex as children move towards abstract thinking. Around age seven children become more interested in games that are structured, and are learning how to follow

directions and rules. This type of play is not seen very much during the preschool years (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988).

Importance of Play. Research has found that play is a very important part of early childhood, but this is not always recognized by early childhood educators or parents. They do not grasp the significance of play. They do not recognize that learning is taking place when young children play (Elkind, 2005; Kostelnik et al., 1999). This is in opposition with the research that shows that play has a relationship to "...memory, distancing and decontextualization, oral language abilities, symbolic generalization, successful school adjustment, and better social skills" (Bodrova & Leong, 2003).

Early childhood educators that have a greater understanding of the power of play as a learning framework still face some difficulties if administrators and parents do not have the same understanding (Kostelnik et al., 1999). This may have negative outcomes if teachers and parents philosophically differ on what is best for children (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Teachers in preschools and early child programs may feel they need to remove play from their curriculum to satisfy parental expectations.

DAP

Developing a Standard. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is an organization seeking to improve and expand quality, education programs for young children (NAEYC, 1996). In an effort to encourage quality the NAEYC developed a standard for early childhood education programs that focuses on the child's developmental level, known as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). The foundation of DAP focuses on the need for knowledge and understanding of child development when creating an effective and individualized learning environment for young children (NAEYC, 1996).

When educators better understand child development their curriculum will be more suitable for the children they serve. According to L. Katz:

In a developmental approach to curriculum design,...[decisions] about what should be learned and how it would best be learned depend on what we know of the learner's developmental status and our understanding of the relationships between early experience and subsequent development (NAEYC, 1996, p. 9).

Research has been done to help us better understand how learning takes place in early childhood. A study conducted by Lorrain McCune shows that pretend play in the early years is connected to language development (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Language is based on representations which children gain experience with during pretend play. The NAEYC has based their standard for early education on these major theories and current research findings (Kostelnik et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1996).

Theoretical Base. Young children are very curious and anxious to learn about the world around them (Elkind, 1987; NAEYC 1996). Learning during the early years can take place through many experiences, the best include hands-on manipulation, problem-solving, and play (NAEYC, 1996; Chaille & Silvern, 1996). DAP takes advantage of the natural curiosity to learn in early childhood by encouraging educators to provide children with many different opportunities to explore a particular concept (NAEYC, 1996). Children have more control over their learning in a curriculum that offers more choices (Kelman; 1990; NAEYC, 1987). A child that can choose their activity is more likely to engage more fully in that activity, and in turn learn more from it (Kelman, 1990; NAEYC, 1987).

Though DAP stresses that children control their learning through selecting their activities, it still recognizes the important role that teachers play in the learning process. Teachers offer

activities that provide challenges that will scaffold children to accomplish more complex tasks (Crain, 1992; NAEYC, 1996). One of the most vital roles teachers possess is structuring the environment, which requires them to be individually-minded and goal-oriented (Kostelnik et al., 1999). Kostelnik et al. tell us that even though teachers are not controlling the entire learning process, they “create physical environments and daily schedules that enable children to engage in purposeful activity” (p. 41).

Children gain a deeper understanding of the concepts taught when social, emotional, physical, and cognitive areas of development are utilized in the learning process (Kostelnik et al., 1999). DAP focuses on the whole child by recognizing the interrelation between all of the developmental areas (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1996). Furthermore, growth in one area may lead to later development in another area. For example, when a young child learns to walk and then is able to explore the world around them because they have greater mobility (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1996). As mentioned previously, Piaget’s cognitive development theory explains how new learning is based upon past development (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). NAEYC emphasizes that children need opportunities to practice newly acquired skills because those skills will be the basis for more difficult tasks later on (Crain, 1992; NAEYC, 1996; Wadsworth, 1996).

Researchers including Piaget have found that “relatively stable, predictable sequences of growth and change occur in children during the first nine years of their life” (NAEYC, 1996, p. 10). These stages or patterns of growth are recognized in DAP and help educators know when developments in different areas have the highest capacity for growth (Kostelnik et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1996). For example, there are time periods in which language, motor skills, and social competency are sensitive to development. The development of motor skills, language, and

cognitive is important during the preschool years (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1996). DAP programs emphasize different areas of growth, and are sensitive to each child's development. These programs provide experiences to help children grow in each area (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1996). Even though a fairly consistent pattern of growth exists, it is important to recognize that each child is unique, and they can differ from other children in their rates of learning (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1987; NAEYC, 1996; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Early childhood educators that are familiar with the developmental level of the children they serve can allow the children to develop at a pace that is comfortable for them, while keeping in mind those sensitive periods (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC 1996).

Preschool educators that provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum realize and respect the individual differences that exist among children. Genetic makeup and a child's environmental surroundings both contribute to their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1996). Culture, religion, home environment, and societal values all influence children in some way (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). NAEYC emphasizes that DAP programs know each of the children in their program and their family background in order to better meet each child's needs (NAEYC, 1996). The education process can be further benefited when teachers know their students and change their curriculum to provide experiences that build on an individual's interests and skills (Kostelnik et al.).

Research has shown DAP programs are beneficial to young children in many ways. Some benefits included, "long-term gains in children's intellectual development, social and emotional skills, and life coping capabilities" (Kostelnik et al., 1999, p. 26). DAP allows children to learn and prepare for later schooling while still maintaining an emphasis on the child's needs.

Parental Interactions

Parent's as Educators. Parents are a key component of a child's life and their role significantly influences development in the early years. The immediate family is the main social network and first learning environment for a young child. According to Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay (1999), when parents are involved with their young children, it helps their children adjust better to public school. Adults, including parents, have many skills that scaffold their children's learning through everyday interactions (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

Early childhood educators that employ DAP are aware of the importance of parents in influencing development. Educators can provide many opportunities for children to grasp those concepts children will need later on, but a collaborative relationship between teachers and parents would provide an even more supportive environment (Bundy, 1991). Those teachers that are in line with DAP seek to build strong relationships with the parents in their programs. A good relationship between a child's home and school fosters open communication, encourages discussion regarding questions, and allows the teacher to better understand the family background (Bundy, 1991; Kostelnik et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1996). Having a trusting and positive relationship with parents enables teachers to better provide a curriculum that is best suited to the needs of each child (Bundy, 1991; NAEYC, 1996). Bundy (1991) acknowledged how important it is that the line of communication with parents should involve the discussion of the programs curriculum and information regarding the child and his or her development. Overall a good relationship and communication between home and school can help create the best learning environments and experiences for children.

Current Trends. With such an emphasis on academic achievement in today's society, there is some disagreement on how young children should be taught. There is such a push to

teach young children more advanced skills such as reading and writing (Golinkoff et al., 2006). There are many different early education programs with differing philosophies, that parents can have a hard time deciding a proper placement for their child. In general, parents genuinely want their children to succeed and to be at the top of their class, this may drive them to choose those programs that are primarily academic focused (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

DAP programs involve academics, while trying to help the child to grow physically, emotionally, and socially (Kostelnik et al., 1999). All areas of development are supported when opportunities to play are provided in preschool classrooms (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). NAEYC recognizes that play permits children to lead and direct their learning that is motivated by their natural curiosity (Kostelnik et al.; NAEYC, 1996).

Despite the research base for developmental programs and play in education, educators face some opposition from families and society in regards to play in their classrooms. Adults who have not been educated about child development theories may have difficulty seeing how play in the classroom is actually fostering learning and growth. In an article by David Elkind (2005), he discusses how parents do not have the ability to remember what it was like for them to be learning about the world around them when they were young children, Elkind calls this childhood amnesia. This helps to explain how parents have a hard time understanding the benefits of play as a learning process. In result, some parents may avoid or question the practices of programs that involve play as a major part of their curriculum.

According to Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff (2003), when parents have a better understanding of play and its potential, their children actually obtain higher levels of play. This information makes it clear how important a parent's attitude of play is. Early childhood educators, who feel play should be the primary vehicle for learning for young children, can help parents and other

adults understand play through communication of the curriculum goals and through parental education (Kostelnik et al., 1999).

Summary

Young children are experiencing a lot of growth during the preschool years including cognitive, motor, social, and emotional development. Developmental theories show that play used as a teaching and learning technique can effectively support and increase development in all areas. Play is an effective teaching method that encourages children to push beyond their current abilities and accomplish more complex tasks. The recognition of play in early childhood is expanding in part because the NAEYC has made it an important part of their DAP philosophy. Some resistance still exists towards play because some feel that it does not promote learning and growth.

Parents are an important part of every child's life. They provide many teaching experiences even before formal education begins. Also, parents want to provide the best possible education to help their children be successful in their life. Some parents may not recognize play as being educational, because they do not remember what it was like to learn and play when they were young. This can cause parents to avoid or have conflict with programs that include play in their curriculum such as DAP programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The objective of this research is to survey parental perspectives of play in the learning process. (1) It is hypothesized that parents will have an understanding of play and its role in learning.

METHODS

Sample

Participants for this quantitative study were obtained as a convenience sample from the preschool class lists of the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab at Utah State University. Two preschool classrooms were selected including one three-year-old, and one four- and five-year-old classroom. Children in the three-year-old preschool attend the Child Development Lab for one sixteen-week session, while children in the four- and five-year-old classes attend for two sixteen-week sessions. Five to six teachers are assigned to each classroom including a head teacher and four to five assistant teachers. The head teacher is a graduate student working towards completion of a child development degree in the Family Consumer and Human Development Department at Utah State University. Teaching assistants are undergraduate students at Utah State University working towards various degrees in education varying from child development to early childhood education. There are 20 children in each class for a total of 40 surveys being sent home.

A letter and envelope was sent home with children inviting parents to participate in the study. The letter informed parents that they would be asked about their opinions of play at home and in school. Also the packet contained two copies of the letter of informed consent stating the purpose for the study and ensuring that minimal harm would result from participation in the study. Each packet was coded to ensure participant anonymity. If parents were willing to take part in the study they were asked to sign both copies and return one in the envelope provided to a locked box located in the drop off/pick up area of the school. Those parents not wishing to participate marked the box on the consent form designating that they do not wish to participate in the study. Parents who gave consent received the Parent As A Teacher Inventory (PAAT).

A total of 22 parents returned the consent form and completed the assessment (N=22), yielding a 55% return rate. All of the parents who participated in the study were female (100%). The gender of the children whose parents participated in the research was 50% male and 50% female.

Measure

The measure used for this research was the Parent As A Teacher Inventory or the PAAT. This assessment was created by Robert D. Strom in order to study parental roles, knowledge of development, and opinions of play. The measure is broken up into 5 subscales including creativity, frustration, control, play, teaching/learning (Strom, 1995b). A parent's ability to support creativity will be assessed in the creativity subscale. The frustration subscale is looking at what areas of parenting are most frustrating. The control subset evaluates parents' feelings about their need to control and how they feel about sharing some of that control and allowing children to have some say in decision making. Teaching and learning examine the belief that a parent has about their ability to influence their child's learning. The play subscale helps researchers better understand how parents view play and how they play with their children (Strom, 1995b). The PAAT consists of 50 statements which parents are directed to rate on a likert scale of strong yes, yes, no, and strong no. (Strom, 1995b). This assessment was estimated to take around 30 minutes to complete

The PAAT appears to measure the general opinions parents have towards play along with their views on their own involvement in play. For example, the statement "It gets on my nerves when my child keeps asking me to watch him or her play" relates very well to the purpose of this study (Strom, 1995a, p. 5). This measure also has high test retest reliability with an alpha coefficient between .80 and .90 (Strom, 1995b). To determine the measures' validity researchers compared parents PAAT answers and their actual behaviors. Studies have shown that "...parent

behavior was consistent with expression of feelings nearly 70 percent of the time” (Strom, 1995b, p. 11).

Each inventory returned was coded by assigning each answer a number: 4-highly favorable, 3-slightly favorable, 2-slightly unfavorable, and 1 highly unfavorable (Strom, 1995b). The measure defined how each answer should be coded. If a question was left unanswered the measure specified that it was to be coded as a two.

RESULTS

Correlational Findings

Each subscale was analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients to determine if there were any relationships between the each of the subscales. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between play and three other subscales including: creativity ($r= 0.580$); teaching/learning ($r= 0.658$); as well as frustration ($r= 0.641$) (see table 1).

Table 1: Correlations

		Play	Teaching/ Learning	Control	Frustration	Creativity
Play	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N=22		.658** .001	.420 .052	.641** .001	.580** .005
Teaching/Learning	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N=22	.658** .001		.393 .071	.596** .003	.550** .008
Control	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N=22	.420 .052	.393 .071		.488* .021	.431* .045
Frustration	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N=22	.641** .001	.596** .003	.488* .021		.385 .077
Creativity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N=22	.580** .005	.550** .008	.431* .045	.385 .077	

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to assess parental opinions of play in an early childhood education setting. A total of 22 parents of preschoolers in the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab completed the Parent As A Teacher Inventory (PAAT). The PAAT looks at five subsets of parenting including creativity, frustration, control, play, and teaching/learning (Strom, 1995b).

It was suspected that there may be some correlation between the play subscale with the creativity, teaching/learning, and frustration subscales. Analysis showed that there was a significant positive relationship between these subscales. Play involves a great deal of imagination, perhaps a parent who supports play is thereby also encouraging creativity and exploration. Also, parents who feel that they hold an important role in their child's development may make it a priority to be involved with their children including in their play. The results also found a strong correlation between parents' opinions of play and their frustration with parenting. This may be an effect of a more being more comfortable with allowing children to engage in play as well as a positive view of themselves as influential in their child's life.

It was hypothesized that parents of children in the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab have an understanding of play and its role in child development. The significance of the relationships between play and other areas of parenting suggest that there is some understanding of play; therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Limitations

The findings of this research need to be considered with caution based on several limitations. The small nature of this research (N=22) resulted in low reliability. The generalizability of the results to the greater population is very limited. With a larger sample size

results may have shown a more accurate approximation of the larger population. Also, participants in this research were obtained through a convenience sample, using a random sampling method to select participants would increase external validity.

Future Research

This research has shown that parents have some understanding of play, but these findings only represent parents of children in the Adele and Dale Child Development Lab. In future research using a larger sample size would help to make the findings representative of a larger group.

Only parents of children in a DAP program were used for this research. Comparing these results with findings from other programs may result in some variation. There may also be a variety of demographics that influence parental opinions. For example, this research did not look into how financial status, ethnicity, number of siblings, employment status, and education level relate to perspectives of play and play behaviors.

Another direction for further research would be to assess opinions of play and actual experiences of play between parents and children. This would allow the researcher the ability to compare how a parent feels about play with their children in comparison to their actual play behaviors. In a similar direction the research could evaluate parent's opinions of play with actual child's play behaviors to assess if there is any relationship between them.

Participants in this research were only sampled once about their opinions of play. A pre-test as children are first beginning the preschool program would assess preliminary opinions of play. During the duration of the preschool session, parental meetings or publications can be sent home to inform parents about play and its role in child development. A post test would then be able to determine if educating parents about play changed the way they understood play.

Implications

The parents of the preschoolers enrolled in the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab have some understanding of play and how it relates to the growth of young children. Teachers in the laboratory should continue to maintain communication with parents. Based on the relationship with answers regarding play and teaching/learning it may also be beneficial to supply information on the importance of play with the ultimate goal of learning and having fun.

CONCLUSION

Research has shown that young children learn best in an environment that includes hands-on manipulation, and opportunities to experiment with new things and sometimes even fail. This allows children to concretely explore the world around them. Developmentally appropriate programs including the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Lab understand the research and implement it in their curriculum. During play children are able to explore, create, test out ideas, and use their imaginations. All of these behaviors, that are key components of play, are supported by the research as being effective learning tools. Understanding how parents feel about play helps educators to know how to more effectively to communicate to insure a better learning environment for children at home and at school. This research found that parents' opinions of play were very much related their acceptance of creativity, belief in themselves as educators, and their ability to handle the stress of parenting.

This research provides many implications for future research and exploration on the topic of play. Replication of this study with a greater sample size would result in an ability to apply the findings to a larger parental population. Using a variety of program centers would allow the researcher to see the difference between programs that institute DAP compared to other

programs. There are many variables that may influence opinions of play and actual play behaviors that need to be further explored.

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