Play is an important aspect of children’s social, emotional, and physical development that is being pushed out of kindergarten because of the drive to meet standards and exceed on assessments. This research explores the perspectives of half-day and full-day kindergarten teachers on play-based learning. Particularly, the value teachers place on the integration of play-based learning into kindergarten instruction, as well as how often they use play-based instruction, are assessed. Furthermore, the influences and pressures kindergarten teachers perceive as barriers to the implementation of play-based learning are investigated. Finally, strategies to implement play-based learning within a standards-based culture of assessment are presented.
Dedicated to:

My Family, Friends, & My Teachers

Without you I would not be the person I am today.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The activity of play in kindergarten is crucial to the development of children (Graue, 2009, Miller & Almon, 2009). With obligations to fulfill mandates such as No Child Left Behind (Lee, et. al., 2006) and pressure to meet state and national standards, teachers are continuously decreasing the amount of play-centered activities in kindergarten classrooms. However, it is important to incorporate play into the curriculum for the development of children. Miller and Almon (2009) discuss that, "the traditional kindergarten classroom that most adults remember from childhood-with plenty of space and time for unstructured play and discovery, art and music, practicing social skills, and learning to enjoy learning-has largely disappeared" (p. 42).

Today, play has taken a backseat in kindergarten to teacher-directed instruction in the belief that the latter is more effective than the former in preparing children to perform well on standards-based assessments. Graue (2009) explained this by stating, "it seems expectations have evolved without a clear sense of purpose or of the needs of the children. The current focus on benchmarks and achievement has focused effort on what is tested rather than what is learned" (p. 30). This describes common practices seen in most full- and half-day contemporary kindergartens today (Ashiabi, 2007). In half-day kindergartens the focus is mainly on drilling students with information that they need to know to meet expectations, with little time for play. Furthermore, this is also seen in full-day kindergartens. Because of the expectations and standards that must be met, many teachers do not allow time for play, or only allow time for play if all material for the day is covered (Graue, 2009). However, teachers may not take in consideration the benefits of play for the development of children. Warner and Parker (2005) expressed that, "Play is healthy and in fact, essential for helping children reach important social,
emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient" (p. 2). Therefore, it is critical for teachers to understand the importance of play in improving stress management and social skills, as well as to feel empowered to integrate play-based learning activities in their kindergarten instruction.

In a child-centered kindergarten, teachers would incorporate play into the daily curriculum (Graue, 2009). Students would have the opportunity to explore their learning environment by means of free-play as well as through teacher-initiated play. Free-play is play that is initiated by the child (Graue, 2009). Furthermore, free-play allows children to develop social relationships with other students, the opportunity to choose their own level of challenge, and the overall ability to make their own decisions (Ashiabi, 2007). Teacher-initiated play is where the teacher is involved in the interactions between students. The teacher is there to provide feedback, extend conversations, and bring in appropriate resources (Graue, 2009). With the focus on play-based learning, students would continue to grow and develop appropriately as well as meet the expectations expected of them (Miller & Almon, 2009).

**Rationale**

For most of us, our fondest memories in school and outside of school were the times that we were involved in activities that incorporated play. We remember kindergarten as a happy place we went, where we rarely sat at a table or desk. It was a place of creativity and fun. There was an abundant amount of art supplies, books, and an entire room with blocks, toys, and balls. Kindergarten was a place to interact with others and begin friendships. It is hard to imagine being a child in the kindergarten of today. There is a constant pressure and rush to finish work, meet standards, exceed milestones, and not be left behind. A metaphor that perfectly illustrates many kindergartens today was provided by Graue (2009), "Several ways exist for planning a trip.
One way is to find a destination and get there as quickly as possible. The trip is all about being there, not getting there. It puts the race ahead of the journey" (p. 30). Today there is constant pressure put on kindergarten students and teachers to exceed and tackle milestones; however in the process, play is being pushed out of kindergarten in order for students to rush toward the acquisition of skills or knowledge without consideration for how the process of learning itself can lead to more important outcomes in addition to the targeted skills or knowledge. Play-based learning activities emphasize the importance of process and product. Contrary to what developmental theory suggests, the focus in contemporary kindergartens is put on the knowledge children may need in later grades to succeed and not on the development of fundamental cognitive, psychological, social and emotional abilities for which their minds and bodies are adapted to develop at this time in their lives and that form the foundation to their happiness and success now and in the future.

**Purpose of Study**

Along with observing play-based learning in a half-day and full-day kindergarten, the perspectives of play in the classroom were analyzed and compared. Additionally, a pre- and post-interview with both teachers were analyzed and compared along with a survey given to a sample of kindergarten teachers. The purpose of this research is to reflect upon the perspectives of half-day and full-day kindergarten teachers' beliefs about play and their classroom implementation of play. Learning more about the beliefs of full-day and half-day kindergarten teachers’ perspectives of play in the classroom will be useful to current and future educators for the process of implementing play into kindergarten classrooms.
Research Questions

The essential questions for this study incorporate the teachers' perspectives of play in the kindergarten classroom, whether or not their beliefs and perspectives of play are actually observed in their classroom, and factors that influence their implementation of play. The specific research questions are stated below:

1. How much value do kindergarten teachers place on play-based learning?
2. What strategies do kindergarten teachers use to implement play-based learning into their curriculum?
3. What outside influences and pressures do kindergarten teachers feel that may affect the amount of play-based learning that occurs in their classroom?
4. How do the perceptions of full- and half-day kindergarten teachers compare?

Significance of Study

Findings from this study will potentially improve the way half-day and full-day kindergarten teachers implement the activity of play into their curriculum. Additionally, this research will help teachers to uncover their own perceptions about play and discover if what they believe is actually implemented in their own classroom. The understanding of these teachers' perspectives on the benefits of and barriers to play in full-day and half-day kindergartens will allow in-service and pre-service teachers to understand ways to include play in kindergarten settings, why play is decreasing in kindergarten, as well as strategies to implement play while still meeting standards and expectations.

Summary of Chapters

The remaining chapters include the review of literature, the methods section, results, and the conclusions of the study. Chapter two summarizes the historical development of
kindergarten and discusses the significance of play in kindergarten curricula over time. This chapter also discusses the role of play in the development of children’s emotional, social, and cognitive development. Chapter three describes the subjects included in the study and the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter four summarizes the results of the data analysis. The results section includes both quantitative and qualitative data that was collected. Lastly, chapter five discusses the results in regard to this study’s research questions and presents implications for classroom practice and recommendations for teachers, administrators, and future research.

**Definition of Terms**

Full-day kindergarten: School for five and six-year olds that lasts the entire school day, approximately six hours.

Half-day kindergarten: School for five and six-year-olds that lasts only half of a school day, approximately two and a half hours.

Free-play: The opportunity of a child to explore and play by his or herself. Children can choose activities that they want to do: activities are not directed by a teacher or an adult (Frost, Wortham, and Riefel, 2008).

Learning centers: Strategically set up stations designed by the teacher that are developmentally appropriate and at the same time hold serious learning value to students (Noah, Rieber, & Smith, 1998).

Directed physical play: Is gross locomotor play that is directed by adults for children. These are activities that are monitored by adults, where children perform appropriate movements for their developmental state (Frost, Wortham, and Reifel, 2008).
Play-based curriculum: A method of teaching focused on the whole child and the dependence on play for teaching and guiding a child during development (Frost, Wortham, and Reifel, 2008).

Didactic kindergarten: A method of teaching that is not student-centered or play-based. There is a focus on the drilling of core subjects, such as reading and math (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008).
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature for this study focused on three broad categories: history of kindergarten, defining play, and play in the kindergarten classroom. From the broad categories, nine more specific categories emerged: the beginning of kindergarten, kindergarten in the United States, full-day and half-day kindergarten, what is play, free-play, directed physical play, play and its social and emotional developmental benefits, play and its physical benefits, decrease of play in kindergarten, developmentally based curriculum, and didactic kindergarten. There was an abundant amount of information about the activity of play in early childhood education; however, it proved difficult locating information directly related to kindergarten classrooms. I also found that there is not a specific definition of play and that many definitions exist. Furthermore, I uncovered some of the underlying reasons for the decrease of play in kindergarten, and discovered it to be difficult to find supporters or proponents of the decrease of play in kindergarten.

The review of literature provided me with a vast understanding of the importance of play in kindergarten. By completing the review of literature, I was able to bring together the history of kindergarten, a definition of play based on many other definitions, and an understanding of the activity of play in kindergarten, from its benefits to why it is decreasing in the classroom.

History of Kindergarten

The Beginning of Kindergarten

Froebel is said to be the founder of kindergarten (Downs, 1978). He saw children as, "Young human beings as looked upon as a piece of wax, a lump of clay, which man could mould as he pleases" (Downs, 1978, p. 42). Froebel established the first kindergarten in 1837 in
Blankenburg, Germany. He wanted the institution to be like no other he had ever seen, not like a traditional school. Froebel did not want children to be schooled but instead to freely develop. Froebel described kindergarten as a,

> General institution for the complete culture of child-life up to school age. As in a garden under God's favor, and by the care of a skilled, intelligent gardener, growing plants are cultivated in accordance with Nature's laws, so here in our childgarden, our kindergarten, shall the noblest of all growing things, men (that is children, germs and shoots of humanity) be cultivated in the accordance with the laws of their own being, of God and Nature. (Downs, 1978, p. 42)

Froebel (1902) founded the concept of kindergarten on the basis that children are instinctively very active creatures that have the need for incessant movement and creativity. The behavior of movement and play is to be cherished and strongly encouraged. Furthermore, Froebel (1902) viewed kindergarten as the next school after the child's family. The family is where the child first starts learning, and once they make their transition into kindergarten, this will become their extended family. The child will learn to use her/his senses and limbs and develop more than s/he could have with only the guidance of the family. In addition, in Froebel’s kindergarten the children would grow a garden. There would be two larger common gardens with flowers and vegetables, which all of the children tended, and then each child would have her/his own separate smaller garden in which s/he looked after on her/his own. The purpose of this was for the children to enjoy planting and growing their own garden, and at the same time understand that they were a part of a larger group when they worked on the larger garden that was tended to by all of the children in the class. As a result, Froebel hoped that by
looking after his/her own plants that the children would see the development and change in their plants overtime and recognize that they are growing up just as their garden is (Downs, 1978).

Froebel (1902) recognized play as being an important, fundamental factor of kindergarten and the development of children. In his writing, he states,

A child that plays thoroughly, with self-active determination, perseveringly until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough determined man capable of self-sacrifice for the promotion of welfare of himself and others. Is not the most beautiful expression of child life at this time a playing child? -- a child wholly absorbed in his play? -- a child that has fallen asleep while so absorbed? (Froebel, 1902).

In Froebel's kindergarten children are treated as individuals who are developing through play at their own developmental level. He aligned nature and education closely with one another. Furthermore, Froebel compared a child to a tree; a tree begins as a weak sapling, but if given proper nutrients will grow into a tree giant in the forest (Downs, 1978).

Froebel (1902) created a series of toys and games, that he called gifts and occupations. The gifts were created to guide and motivate child's play. The gifts would aid children in the development of movement and teach them the laws of nature. Additionally, to maintain and assure constant progress the gifts would gradually become more complex as the child continued to develop. Each gift would be a building block to the next gift they were presented. The gifts are as follows:

First gift: six small yarn balls, one each in a primary or secondary color

Second gift: A small wool ball, wood cylinder, and wood cube

Third gift: A small wooden cube, composed of eight component cubes
Fourth gift: A small wooden cube, composed of eight rectangular blocks
Fifth gift: A larger wooden cube, composed of 27 cubes
Sixth gift: A comparably sized wooden cube, composed of 27 rectangular blocks
Seventh gift: Wooden tablets (squares, half squares, triangles, half triangles, third triangles) [parquetry shaped blocks]
Eighth gift: Wooden sticks (lines) and metal curves (circles, half circles, quadrants)
Ninth gift: Points (beans, seeds, pebbles, holes in paper)
Tenth gift: Peas (or pellets) construction with sticks

Occupations: Plastic clay (solids), paper folding (surfaces), weaving (lines), drawing (lines), stringing beads (points), and painting (surfaces) (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008, p. 11).

These gifts and occupations were given to children as they progressively developed. Moreover, the gifts and occupations allowed children to experience a universe that could be understood in physical terms (nature), mathematics, and art. Children's activities in kindergarten would allow children to encounter the forms of nature, knowledge, and beauty by the use of these gifts and occupations (Froebel, 1902).

**Kindergarten in the United States**

The idea of kindergarten caught on quickly in the United States. In 1856, kindergarten made its way to the United States and the first kindergarten was established in Wisconsin. (Downs, 1978; Lee et al., 2006; Ray & Smith, 2010). Barnard (1838), an advocate of kindergarten, expanded the concept of kindergarten to the United States (Lee et al., 2006). He returned to the United States after traveling around London and researching kindergartens. He wrote a vast amount about his experiences. His writings influenced Peabody to open a
kindergarten in Boston in 1860 (Downs, 1978). The kindergarten was successful children that were enrolled responded very well to the stimulation. However, Peabody lacked training and field experience. She was not satisfied with her efforts and felt she needed to learn more about Froebel's work. Therefore, Peabody visited European kindergartens and visited Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülows and studied with Froebel's widow. After Peabody returned to the United States, she corrected the errors in her kindergarten. With her sister, Peabody-Mann, she began to write and lecture to spread and further explain Froebel's ideas of kindergarten (Ray & Smith, 2010).

In 1872, Blow, a leader in the kindergarten movement, petitioned the school board in St. Louis to undertake an experiment. She provided her services without salary and opened a teacher training school. Additionally, she trained and educated teachers for twelve years in the St. Louis educational system starting in 1873. Through her school, she stimulated the growth of public kindergartens. Within a decade there were more than fifty public kindergartens opened in St. Louis. The growth and expansion of kindergarten continued in the United States, and by the turn of the century kindergarten was an established educational stepping stool that was widely accepted (Downs, 1978; Lee et al., 2006).

**Full-day Kindergarten and Half-day Kindergarten**

Full-day kindergarten is not what was initially intended when kindergarten was created (Ashiabi, 2007). Today, many believe that full-day kindergarten is the best way to prepare children for their social and academic transition to first grade. Advocates for full-day kindergarten suggest that, a longer day provides educational support to ensure a productive beginning school experience and increases the chances of future school success, particularly for poor children" (Lee et al., 2006). Additionally, families, especially those of low socioeconomic
status, are provided time to work during the day (Ray & Smith, 2010). By sending students to school for the full-day it allows for students to acquire more knowledge and at the same time allow their parents more time to work. Moreover, teachers have more opportunities to assess students and determine their individual educational needs because there is more time to work with each individual student (Lee et al., 2006). Full-day kindergarten also offers students more time in the classroom and the opportunity to learn more content and skills (Lee et al., 2006). In addition, opportunities for closer teacher-parent relationships are provided, because parents will have a larger time frame to try and volunteer in the classroom if they are available (Lee et al., 2006). Most importantly, today full-day kindergartens provide teachers and students the time necessary to learn and master requirements for grade proficiency and academic progress that have been put into place by NCLB and standardized testing (Ray & Smith, 2010).

Opponents of full-day kindergarten suggest that full-day programs are not of value to children. The opponents of full-day kindergarten advocate the need for half-day kindergartens and suggest that children who attend full-day kindergarten are at risk of stress and fatigue due to the amount of time in the classroom (Lee et al., 2006). Additionally, full-day programs increase the chance that children will be expected to achieve and perform beyond their developmental capabilities (Lee et al., 2006).

The cost of the program also grows when the school needs to hire more teachers and provide an appropriate amount of space for learning, as well as other accommodations for the children that will be in the facility for the full day (Ray & Smith, 2010). In addition, academic gains made by children who attend full-day kindergarten diminish by first grade and disappear by third grade (Cannon et al., 2006). Lee et al., (2006) describe a similar study where students attended full-day and half-day kindergarten. The results concurred with the results of Cannon et.
al., (2006). Students that attended full-day kindergarten were more likely to be on grade level than students that attended half-day programs. Additionally, by third grade students who attended the full-day program showed higher achievement in math, reading, science, and attendance than those students that attended the half-day program. However, when these students reached fourth grade, the full-day advantage only seemed relevant in science and attendance achievement (Lee et. al., 2006). Other researchers have noted inconsistencies in the findings of the benefits of full-day kindergarten (Cannon et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Ray & Smith, 2010).

Half-day kindergarten was the result of the growing number of children attending school, lack of capacity of public schools to take in the growing number of school-aged children, shortage of teachers, and the belief that five-year-olds were not mature and developed enough to tolerate a full day away from their mothers and without napping (Bruno & Adams, 1994). Currently, because of the focus on fulfilling standards and academic achievement measured via high-stakes testing, half-day kindergartens are fading out. The percentage of children attending full-day programs grew from 10 percent in 1961 to 33 percent in 1987 to 45 percent in 1993 (Bruno & Adams, 1994). In Ohio, approximately 50 percent of students attend full-day programs (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, Ohio has made it compulsory for schools to provide only full-day kindergarten by fall 2011. However, budgetary hardships have allowed schools to delay their implementation of full-day kindergarten (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). Proponents and opponents of full-day and half-day kindergartens continue to research the benefits and implications of each format.
Defining Play

What is Play?

Play is an important aspect of early childhood education and in the development of children. According to Rieber, Smith, and Noah (1998), play is a crucial process that helps learning throughout life. Play motivates learning and contributes to development. Rieber, Smith, and Noah (1998) believe play connects learning and motivation:

Play is an essential part of the learning process throughout life and should not be neglected. . . Play that is serious and focused within a learning environment can help learners construct a more personalized and constructive understanding. As educators, our challenge is to implicate motivation into learning through play and to recognize that play has an important cognitive role in learning. (p.35)

This explains the importance of play in learning for a lifetime. Children are motivated to learn when they are intrigued and interested. The motivation to learn is ignited by the need to play.

Play must be engaging and fun. According to Myck-Wayne (2010), play must include an element of fun, in addition to being internally motivating. Furthermore, a child must be actively engaged in an activity that can be shaped into his/ her own experiences. If the activity is not his/her own, it is not play. Play can be seen in different ways in the classroom.

Children's play has been classified as an activity that is intrinsically motivating, pleasurable, freely chosen, non-literal, actively engaging, opportunistic, active, imaginative, and creative (Ashiabi, 2007). Play can take place in many forms and happen often in a classroom.

Vygotsky (1978) focused on dramatic play and make-believe play, and based on those he stated that play has three components: children create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles, and follow a set of rules determined by specific roles. In addition, the work of Vygotsky (1978)
implies that play is not completely spontaneous; that is, children abide by a set of rules. He concluded that, "play is not the predominant form of activity, but in a certain sense, the leading source of development" (p.6). Several forms of play exist and this research will explore common types of play seen in kindergarten classrooms: free-play, learning centers, and directed physical play.

**Free-Play**

Free-play is the opportunity for a child to explore and play by his or herself. Children can choose activities that they would like to partake in and the activities are not directed by a teacher or an adult. Often times, free-play occurs on the playground. Furthermore, motor skills are being developed during free-play on a playground because children are able to move around and have more opportunities to use their bodies. Frost, Wortham, and Riefel (2008) explain that,

A full range of motor skills can be nurtured through adult-directed activities, the opportunity for children to engage in physical movements related to spontaneous, natural play is needed as well. Young children particularly need to be outdoors where there is space for all kinds of physical movements as they engage in play activities alone or with their friends. (p.129)

Free-play can also take place in the classroom, most often seen in center time. Students have the opportunity to choose what they would like to do in the classroom, such as make-believe or pretend play in a dramatic play area, or simply choose a game to play. According to Graue (2010) free-play in kindergarten is beneficial because it allows children to select their own level of challenge and allows students to function in a low stress atmosphere. Free-play is an opportunity for students to develop gross motor and physical skills, interact with other students, and develop mental constructs.
Learning Centers

Learning centers are stations strategically set up by the teacher that are developmentally appropriate and at the same time hold serious learning value to students (Noah, Rieber, & Smith, 1998). Learning centers can consist of different types of play, such as dramatic play and game play. Dramatic play is when children have the opportunity to use props and express themselves on their own without the direction of an adult (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Dramatic play aids children in learning social skills, like cooperation and following directions. Furthermore, dramatic play develops literacy and problem-solving skills because the children have the opportunity to use their vocabulary when communicating with one another (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Games are also used in learning centers. Teachers use games in their classrooms because they improve practical reasoning skills and communication skills. Moreover, using games during center time improves student’s motivational levels because they enjoy the task at hand (Noah, Rieber, & Smith, 1998).

Directed Physical Play

Directed physical play refers to gross locomotor play that is directed by adults for children. Directed physical play activities are gaining in popularity among kindergarten-aged children. There are many opportunities for children to play on sports teams such as soccer, little league baseball, gymnastics, and football teams. These activities are monitored by adults, where children perform appropriate movements for their developmental state. Frost, Wortham, and Reifel (2008) state that, “Children’s physical development can be evaluated and attention given to correct inappropriate movements that can be an impediment to the child in later years when participating in sports and recreational activities” (p.128). In addition, directed physical play shares common characteristics of free play in which children still need to negotiate and establish rules as well as interact with others (Warner & Parker, 2005). Furthermore, directed physical
play can also be seen in the classroom. Teachers may direct an activity that children must do in the classroom that requires movement and physical activity. The teacher can take the role of a participant in play in the classroom and have the ability to direct the children and engage them in appropriate activities for their developmental state. When a teacher is involved in physical play and participates with the children, it allows him or her to have the opportunity to control and direct student learning (Hadley, 2002).

**Play In the Kindergarten Classroom**

**Play and Its Social and Emotional Development Benefits**

During the kindergarten years, children are developing on many levels: emotionally, socially, and physically. Play provides a nonthreatening venue for children to develop socially and emotionally by learning to (a) appropriately express their emotions, (b) understand the emotions of peers, and (c) regulate their own emotions. As the social world of a child gets larger, emotional expressions serve an important role in communication with peers, and informs peers what intention another child has (Halberstadt et al., 2001). Through social play, a child learns how to properly express his/her emotions to other peers, which is essential in learning how to interact with others. In turn, social play allows children to learn how to understand other children and whether or not they should engage in an activity with them (Graue, 2009).

The development of emotional and social expression is a vital part of childhood and gaining peer acceptance. Through social play, children form and maintain relationships with peers. Children who do not form relationships with peers are at great risk for not learning skills that are vital in communicating with others (Ashiabi, 2007). Children who are able to interact with peers are able to learn and practice new skills, refine old ones, and gain proficiency in social interactions (Hartup, 1992). Ashiabi (2007) stated that play develops the skills of problem
solving, cooperation, social understanding, and rule following. Essentially, through play children learn conflict resolution skills while they interact with peers working towards a common goal. Hartup (1992) and Ashiabi (2007) both suggest that play builds children's social and emotional development.

**Play and Its Physical Benefits**

Play also aids in developing children's physical skills. Ratey (2008) explained that exercise has a positive effect on our brain and that increased physical activity; shows a decrease in levels of stress and depression, and an increase in the ability to focus for longer periods of time. Physical activity also decreases the risk of childhood obesity. Brownson (2010) stated, "Childhood obesity is a serious public health problem. During the past three decades, obesity rates have increased three-fold among U.S. children and adolescents. Approximately 16% of children and adolescents aged 2 to 19 years are obese" (p. 436). Obesity is an energy imbalance in the body, caused when more energy is taken in through the consumption of food and drink, than the amount of energy being exerted. Energy is burned through growth and development, metabolism, and physical activity (Brownson, 2010). Frost, Wortham, and Reifel (2008) agree and state that, “Children today are more sedentary than they were 20 years ago. Inappropriate nutrition has resulted in an increase in obesity and poor physical condition, and young children with elevated blood pressure and cholesterol” (p.164). Frost et al., (2008) further stated that opportunities for play in the classroom can help decrease the possibility of childhood obesity and the onset of poor physical conditioning in young children. Furthermore, children's physical development and gross motor skills are targeted when children play. Gross motor development involves moving the entire body. Additionally, gross locomotor skills are the movements that allow children to move about using jumping, running, climbing, and hopping. Children continue
to develop their gross motor and locomotor skills during their school-age years (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008).

**Decrease of Play in Kindergarten**

The kindergarten curriculum has seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of play that is incorporated into classroom instruction and in the amount of school-yard play. Meisels and Shonkoff (2006) described some factors that caused play to decrease in the kindergarten classroom when they stated,

> The spirit of Froebel's philosophy remained intact until the 1970s, when the educational value of early childhood programs began to be recognized. Several factors sparked this shift: Sputnik, rejection of the principles of progressive education, emerging research on cognitive growth in infants and young children, such intervention programs for poor young children as Head Start, and the growing importance of quality early education to the middle class. (p.296)

These factors focused on the academic dimensions of child development. Kindergarten shifted from a play-based curriculum to a curriculum focused on formal teaching and meeting standards. The standards movement of the 1990s reinforced the focus of academic success. Collectively agreeing with this, Miller and Almon (2009) summed up this alarming trend in kindergarten:

> Too few Americans are aware of the radical changes in kindergarten practice in the last ten to twenty years. Children now spend far more time being instructed and tested in literacy and math than they do learning through play and exploration, exercising their bodies, and using their imaginations. Many kindergartens use highly prescriptive curricula linked to standardized tests. An increasing number of teachers must follow scripts from which they may not deviate. Many children struggle to live up to the
academic standards that are developmentally appropriate. . . At the same time that we have increased academic pressure in children’s lives through inappropriate standards, we have managed to undermine their primary tool for dealing with stress- freely chosen, child-directed, intrinsically motivating play. (p.15)

Kindergarten classrooms are beginning to resemble first-grade classrooms with their emphasis on formal reading and mathematics instruction rather than a focus on the development of social skills and play (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). The focus on academics has increased and led to the emergence of academic kindergartens, where, “5-year-olds are more likely to encounter skill-and-drill exercises and nightly homework [more] than unstructured, imaginative playtime” (Currwood, p. 30, 2007). Many kindergarten teachers are feeling the pressure to teach essential literacy and math skills rather than using instructional time to play. “Kindergarten is now first grade, and first grade is now second grade. It used to be normal for first graders to still be learning to read. Now, the handful of kindergartners who aren’t reading by the end of the year are considered behind” (Curwood, p. 30, 2007). If we go back one decade, only 15 percent of kindergartners were reading, if we go back thirty years, there were only 5 percent of kindergartners reading, and now nearly 90 percent of kindergartners are reading at the end of kindergarten (Curwood, 2007). The latest research indicates that on a typical day in an all-day kindergarten children spend four to six times more time in literacy and math instruction and preparing for tests than in free time or 'choice time' (Miller & Almon, 2009).

High-stakes testing and test preparation are the driving force behind moving play out of kindergarten. Today, in America, to succeed one must be well-trained in academics and ready to join the work force. However, Pink (2006), states,
People have to be able to do something that's hard to automate and that delivers on the growing demand for nonmaterial things like stories and design. Typically, these are things we associate with the right side of the brain, with artistic and empathetic and playful sorts of abilities. (p. 123)

Society wants children to perform well on academics and standardized tests. The belief that didactic, teacher-centered instruction and worksheets are effective strategies to promote successful performance on standardized tests has resulted in the exodus of play from not only the classroom but from the school entirely (Miller & Almon, 2009). Yet, this neglects the development of the right side of the brain, which is important for performing tasks that require creativity, empathy and behaviorally flexibility. The United States is now a nation that is driven by assessments, not creativity.

**Play-Based Curriculum**

A play-based curriculum is based on the traditional kindergarten, which focused on the whole child and the dependence on play for teaching and guiding a child during development. Most classrooms with play-based instruction have time for free-play, where there are usually learning centers set up that may include: a dramatic play center, block area, art center, music center, book center, or a writing center (Frost et al., 2008). In a classroom with a play-based curriculum there is a balance between simple and complex play materials. The simple materials are resources that are easy to use and only have one use, such as a book or a worksheet. Complex materials are things that have many uses, such as clay or play dough. Furthermore, these materials allow children to learn through play by using open-ended materials or materials that have many uses (Horn et al., 2011). In a classroom that uses play-based instruction, there is often an hour of the day given to free play that is uninterrupted. From a developmental
perspective, an hour of free-play is not that large of an amount; however, it is typically more time designated to play than a didactic program gives its students for play that is uninterrupted by the teacher and student-led (Hoorn et al., 2011).

**Didactic Kindergarten**

Didactic programs are programs that are not student-centered or play-based. They tend to focus on the drilling of core subjects, such as reading and math (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008). Many times didactic programs are instituted by principals and superintendents to ensure that the students are meeting the standards and expectations (Graue, 2009). In these programs, there is usually a 'power hour' of reading lessons added to the reading lessons already put into place. These lessons are focused on meeting the requirements of the state and are considered essential preparation for standardized tests. Didactic programs eliminate child-centered activities, such as free play, and fill this time with direct teaching that attempts to drill skills into students. These programs often cut out recess or only allow children to go out for recess after they have finished whatever materials they needed to for the day. Didactic kindergartens have a decreased amount of play, if there is any time at all, and an enormous amount of focus put on meeting standards and focusing on the core subjects of reading and math (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008).

**Conclusion**

Play in the kindergarten classroom is vital for the healthy development of children. Kindergarten was meant to be a place where children grew and developed using play as expressed by Froebel (1902), the inventor of kindergarten. Play aides children in developing social, emotional, and physical skills (Ashiabi, 2007; Brownson et. al, 2010; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008; Hadley, 2002; Rieber et al., 1998). Today, there are two main types of
kindergartens, play-based and didactic. In play-based kindergartens, children have the
opportunity to learn through play and exploration, whereas in the didactic kindergarten, the
children learn through drills and worksheets. The decrease in the amount of time spent playing
seems to be driven by the need to meet standards and preform well on standardized assessments
(Ashiabi, 2007; Brownson et. al., 2010; Graue, 2009; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008; Hadley,
2002; Rieber et al., 1998).
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Purpose and Research Questions

The activity of play in kindergarten is crucial to the development of children (Ashiabi, 2007). With obligations, such as No Child Left Behind and pressure to meet state and national standards, teachers are continuously decreasing the amount of play-based activities in kindergarten classrooms (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008). Although virtually all teacher education programs and child advocacy groups stress the importance of play in child development, current classroom practices rely primarily on didactic instruction. This research project examines this discrepancy by exploring the relationship of kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How much value do kindergarten teachers place on play-based learning?
2. What strategies do kindergarten teachers use to implement play-based learning into their curriculum?
3. What outside influences and pressures do kindergarten teachers feel that may affect the amount of play-based learning that occurs in their classroom?
4. How do the perceptions of full- and half-day kindergarten teachers compare?

Methods

Mixed Method Rationale

This study employed a mixed method approach to research. A mixed method approach allows for a deeper understanding of the topic and the concept being examined by including both qualitative and quantitative data that are used in investigate a single problem. Creswell (2003) stated that, “Researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods” (p.14). Furthermore, a mixed method can be helpful to use because
the qualitative results can be derived from the quantitative results. In this study, that is exactly what was done. The quantitative survey was given to kindergarten teachers and that survey led to what was asked and observed while gathering qualitative results by interviewing and observing.

The method of research that is appropriate for this study is phenomenology. Qualitative research allows the researcher to emerge him/herself into the study to better understand the issue or phenomenon. Lichman (2006) describes phenomenology as, "A method (that) looks at the lived experiences of those who have experienced a certain phenomenon" (p. 70). The phenomenon that has been witnessed in these kindergarten classrooms is the disappearance of play in favor of didactic instruction as a means to prepare students for standardized tests and raised academic achievement. The research was executed through a survey, classroom observations, and interviews. Furthermore, the observation and interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of results from the survey and for the researcher to understand the observations made in kindergarten classrooms. The follow-up interview after each classroom observation enabled the researcher to probe more deeply into issues or questions arising from the classroom observations.

**Interview Research Rationale**

This study was designed to incorporate the process of interviewing as a way to further investigate what was seen in the observations. Interviews were used because they provide insights to the teacher's opinions and perceptions (Glesne, 1999). “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not seen and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived” (Weiss, 1994, p.1). Moreover, interviews were the best way to understand what was seen in the teacher's classroom and reveal
the teacher's perceptions of play in kindergarten. Seidman (1998) explained that, "At the depth of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). Interviews were vital in understanding what was seen in the classroom and how the teacher's experiences have affected the way they implement play into their curriculum.

**Observational Research Rationale**

Jorgensen (1989) said that observation is used to uncover and seek meaning to something that is unknown. For this reason, classroom observations were conducted in this research study. Observation was used in this study to better understand the activities that occurred in a half and full-day kindergarten classroom, as well as to identify the types of play-based learning being implemented into the curriculum. Jorgensen (1989) stated that observation is used to see the truths about human life. Classroom observations were conducted for an entire day in the full-day kindergarten and for one morning and one afternoon class in the half-day kindergarten. Observing allowed the researcher to get a sense of the classroom atmosphere and see how the teacher actually implemented play into her instruction. This served as a means to verify how much play the teacher said she actually implemented during the interviews.

**Instrumentation and Procedures**

**Quantitative Instrumentation**

**Design and structure of the survey.**

The survey was intended to gather a quantitative overview of full and half-day kindergarten teacher’s beliefs of play-based learning in their classroom. The survey was self-designed and reviewed by a content specialist for content validity. The survey questions were used to gain an understanding of the research questions developed for this study.
survey questions that were used to help answer the research questions for this study were the level of importance place on play-based learning, the strategies they use to implement play, pressures that may be felt by outside influences, participants current teaching setting, and whether of not there is enough time to include play on a daily basis in their classroom. Furthermore, the results of the survey were used to develop and/or refine the interview questions. The survey consisted of nine questions, eight of which were multiple choice and one was open response, where the participants were able to list strategies they use in their classroom to implement play. See Appendix A for the complete survey.

**Administration of the survey.**

The survey was administered over the Internet through an email link to SurveyMonkey. Kindergarten teachers throughout Ohio were emailed the survey link and asked to volunteer their time to participate. Kindergarten teachers were found by using school directories on the Internet. They were prompted to read the consent letter that was sent along with the survey agreeing to the terms of the research as well as information on what the study was about. The consent letter can be found in Appendix B. Responses were anonymous.

**Qualitative Instrumentation**

**Design and structure of the interview.**

The intention of the interviews was to gather more insight about kindergarten teachers’ perspectives of play, the strategies they use to implement play-based learning, and what pressures they feel hinder their inclusion of play in their curriculum. Two kindergarten teachers were interviewed: a full-day teacher and a half-day teacher. The teachers’ observed agreed to participate in two interviews: a pre-interview, which was conducted before the classroom observation, and a post-interview, which was conducted after the classroom observation. See
Appendix C for the consent letter for the pre-interview. See Appendix D for the consent letter for the post-interview. See Appendix E for the classroom observation consent letter.

There were eight questions on the pre-interview with some additional questions that could be asked depending on the response of the participant. The content of the pre-interview questions focused around the teacher’s perceptions of play in the classroom, the strategies they use in their classroom to implement play-based learning, why they think play is or is not beneficial to kindergarteners, and other general questions about their typical day. See Appendix F for the complete list of pre-interview questions. Furthermore, the post interview focused around the instructional practices I observed in their classroom. There were four questions on the post-interview with some additional questions that could be asked based on the responses. The interview focused around the teachers' perceptions of play, how they implemented play into their kindergarten instruction, the benefits of play in kindergarten, why their instructional practices may not be play-based or as much play-based as they would like, as well as the pressure they may be feeling to ignore best practices in favor for primarily didactic instruction. Information gathered from the pre-interview and classroom observation was used to create the questions for the post-interview. Due to the teacher’s comfort levels, specific questions about not implementing play-based learning into their classroom were not asked. See Appendix G for the complete list of post-interview question.

**Design and structure of the observation.**

The intention of the classroom observations was to collect data at one half-day and one full-day kindergarten. Moreover, the classroom observation enabled the researcher to focus on the teacher's implementation of play into their classroom. Classroom observations proved to be
helpful in providing reliability in the study to determine if what was heard in the interviews was practiced in the classrooms.

While observing, the researcher followed a protocol, which was completed during each observation. The observation protocol can be found in Appendix H. The protocol required the researcher to describe the daily schedule for the day, how much instructional time was spent on each subject, examples and amount of time spent on teacher-directed play, examples and amount of time spent on student-directed play, and the strategies the teacher used to implement play into the classroom. Additionally, the protocol allowed the researcher to focus on the information needed to answer the research questions about play-based learning for the study.

Data Collection and Sample

Participants

The participants for this study were two kindergarten teachers; one teacher that teaches in a full-day kindergarten, Miss Apple, and one teacher who taught in a half-day kindergarten, Miss Brown. The teacher at the full-day kindergarten taught at a pre-k to sixth-grade elementary school in a rural town in Midwest, Ohio. Miss Apple is a Caucasian female who has taught kindergarten for 21 years. She has taught 16 years of half-day kindergarten and the last five years in full-day kindergarten. At this particular school, the school day lasted from 8:50 a.m. to 3:20 p.m. The kindergarten students were at school the entire time. Miss Apple’s class consisted of 20 students, ten females and ten males.

The half-day kindergarten was located in a suburban city in Ohio, with multiple elementary schools within the city. Miss Brown has taught kindergarten for 25½ years. She taught for one year in a full-day kindergarten setting, but due to enrollment she was switched to half-day. Miss Brown taught a morning and an afternoon class. Both groups of students are in
school for two and one-half hours. Miss Brown’s morning class has 24 students: 14 males and ten females. Her afternoon class had 18 students: ten females and eight males.

Miss Apple and Miss Brown’s schools were located in different areas, however they were very similar. The families that attend the schools have similar socioeconomic statuses. In addition, the schools received similar Ohio Department of Education Report Card Scores. Both schools scored, effective for the 2009-2010 school year (ODE, 2011).

**Classroom Atmosphere**

The atmosphere in the Miss Apple’s full-day kindergarten was friendly and inviting. Miss Apple referred to her students as ‘friends.’ The students were energized and eager to learn throughout the day. The students sat at four large tables, with five students at each table. The room had a carpet area in the front, where students gathered for story time and other activities. Additionally, there were areas that were used for center time that included; a Lego table, game area, a kitchen area, painting center, and a listening center. Furthermore, shelves of books lined the walls for students to explore. There were also two computers and a television available in the classroom.

Miss Brown’s half-day kindergarten was positive and inviting as well. Miss Brown and the students used phrases like, ‘kiss your brain’ that kept the positive atmosphere going in the classroom. Students were excited to be at school and enjoyed socializing with their peers. The students sat at six different tables and four students sat at each table. The walls were covered in signs about learning, such as numbers and colors. There were several different center areas in the room as well as a carpet area. The center areas included block play, listening, a kitchen area, and a puppet theater. Additionally, Miss Brown’s room was equipped with four computers for students to use.
Survey Participants

The survey participants were purposefully chosen based on the fact that they were kindergarten teachers. Public school districts from across the state of Ohio were used to gather participants. Overall, 92 surveys were sent out and 32 of the surveys were responded to, thus giving this survey a 35% response rate. The participants of the survey consisted of 20 full-day kindergarten teachers and 12 half-day kindergarten teachers. Moreover, 20 of the participants have been teaching kindergarten for over eight years, five have been teaching between four and seven years, and seven have been teaching between one and three years.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data from the surveys. Descriptive statistics are simple mathematic processes that allow for simplification, summarization, and organization of groups of numerical data. In this study the most commonly used descriptive statistics are percentages, which allow for simple recognition of common answers in data sets (Mertler, 2009). The surveys were taken online through SurveyMonkey, which stored the information and analyzed the data statistically. The open response question, What strategies do you use to implement play into you classroom? was coded for similar answers.

Qualitative Data Analysis

During the interview process, for both the pre and post-interviews, the kindergarten teacher’s responses were written down in detail for each question. Furthermore, the interviews and observation protocols were coded based on several assertions. Coding allowed the researcher to establish common themes in the data, which are called assertions, and warrants,
which are the pieces of evidence that support the themes or assertions (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Furthermore, describing this method, Saladana, Berelvas, and Leavy (2011) discussed that, “assertions are declarative statements of summative synthesis” (p. 119). Which means that assertions are pieces taken from data that help explain the main reasons behind the research. Moreover, they continue to discuss the use of warrants to prove and agree with the assertions that were made (Saladana, Berelvas, and Leavy, 2011). The assertions considered for this study were purposefully centered around the research questions. The data gathered from the interviews, the surveys, and the classroom protocols led to the assertions created for this study. The assertions were strategically lined up with the research questions to fully and accurately answer them. The first assertion was the value the teachers put on play; the second was the influences or pressures that may be felt by teachers; and the last assertion was strategies to implement play-based learning in the classroom. These assertions were made in order to find appropriate evidence, or warrants, to help to answer the research questions. Overall, many warrants were found within the interview questions that supported the assertions that were made, making the coding process more simplistic.

**Limitations**

**Quantitative Limitations**

Surveys generally have some limitations. In the quantitative survey administered for this study two kinds of limitations may be seen. One of the limitations in this study is what Fowler (2009) would call a sampling error. He discussed that this type of error can occur when you use a small sample of a population, not the entire population (Fowler, 2009). Participants in the study were purposefully selected based on the fact that they taught kindergarten and the sample was relatively small; therefore, sampling error could be present.
Another limitation that could be relevant to this study would be bias. Fowler (2009) stated, “bias means that in some systematic way the people responding to a survey are different from the target population as a whole” (p. 13). In this study the participants chose to be a part of the research and may have held a bias that would be unknown to the researcher.

**Qualitative Limitations**

The main qualitative limitation is subjectivity of the researcher. Holloway (1997) explained that, the researcher may not take a non-judgmental stance towards the thoughts and words of the participants” (p. 139). In this study, to increase reliability I asked the two kindergarten teachers about their responses I had recorded in their interviews to make sure that I understood them correctly and that their meanings were not misinterpreted. Another limitation to this study is the amount of observational time. Only one day was spent in the full-day kindergarten classroom, and only one afternoon and morning class was observed in the half-day kindergarten. This is a limitation in this study because the observations captured only one point in time and may not accurately represent the full scope of each teacher’s classroom practices.

**Summary**

This research study employed a mixed methods approach. A quantitative survey was given to a group of kindergarten teachers to examine their beliefs and perspectives of play-based learning. To more deeply examine the research questions, two kindergarten teachers, a full-day and a half-day teacher, were interviewed and observed. For both of the teachers, they participated in a pre-interview before the classroom observation and a post-interview after the classroom observation. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the interviews and classroom observations were coded for evidence to answer the four research questions. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Play in kindergarten is important to the development of children. The activity of play allows children the opportunity to develop physically, socially, and emotionally (Graue, 2009). Nationally, there is a decrease in the amount of play-based learning in the kindergarten curriculum because of the push to meet standards and excel on assessments. Many teachers believe that play-based learning is valuable to students but is sometimes not seen in their classroom practice. This project examined this discrepancy by exploring the relationship between kindergartner teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How much value do kindergarten teachers place on play-based learning?
2. What strategies do kindergarten teachers use to implement play-based learning into their curriculum?
3. What outside influences and pressures do kindergarten teachers feel that may affect the amount of play-based learning that occurs in their classroom?
4. How do the perceptions of full- and half-day kindergarten teachers compare?

Findings by Research Question

The qualitative and quantitative results of this study will be shared by research question in order to maintain organization and ease of reading. In doing so, it will be simpler to compare and contrast the results of each data set and make for a greater understanding of the research questions.
Research Question One: How Much Value do Kindergarten Teachers Place on Play-Based Learning?

Quantitative results.

The results related to the first research question come from survey question 4. The results indicated that the majority of participants believed that learning through play-based instruction is important. As shown in Figure 1, participant’s beliefs of the level of importance of play-based learning activities in their classroom ranged in response from very important to very unimportant. None of the kindergarten teachers responded to play as being unimportant, 3% reported that play-based activities were very unimportant, 16% remained neutral, 34% claimed that play-based learning is very important, and the majority of full-day and half-day kindergarten teachers rated play-based learning as important, with 47% responding in that manner.
Figure 1. The level of importance of play-based learning activities for kindergarten students. This figure illustrates the level of importance of kindergarten students to learn through play-based activities as responded by full-day and half-day kindergarten teachers.

Qualitative results.

The qualitative results for this study were discovered by interviewing two teachers; one full-day kindergarten teacher, Miss Apple, and one half-day kindergarten teacher, Miss Brown. Qualitative results were gathered through observations in both of the classrooms as well as a pre-interview and a post interview. Observing and interviewing a full-day and a half-day kindergarten teacher provided an opportunity to look more deeply into differences that may result from their different time constraints to be seen and heard about play-based learning in their classroom.

The interviews and observations were conducted with Miss Apple in a full-day kindergarten setting and Miss Brown in a half-day setting, to answer the first research question. They were asked several different interview questions, the first being, Do you believe play-based learning should be included in a kindergarten curriculum? Table 1 depicts their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do You Believe Play-Based Learning should be Included in a Kindergarten Curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Yes, but play with a purpose.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows both teachers’ responses to the interview question, *Do you think that allowing children the opportunity for play-based learning benefits their development?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</th>
<th>Miss Brown (Half-Day Teacher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “Helps students develop socially, emotionally, and creatively.”</td>
<td>• “Children use play to develop social skills, vocabulary, and other academic skills.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Many times it is some of the students’ first real experiences with other children and that they learn how to challenge themselves and others through interactions during times when they have the opportunity to play.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miss Apple and Miss Brown agreed that allowing children the opportunity for play-based learning will benefit students’ development. Furthermore, Miss Apple discussed that students learn how to communicate with other children through interactions. Concurring with this, Miss Brown discussed that play-based learning helps children develop social skills.
Next, Miss Apple and Miss Brown were asked, *What value do you put on using play-based learning activities into your classroom on a daily basis?* Table 3 depicts their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</th>
<th>Miss Brown (Half-Day Teacher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• She believes in using free exploration and modeling in her classroom.</td>
<td>• “Play is important, but I think you need a variety of strategies to teach, not just play.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown put value on using play-based learning activities into their classrooms however, they use other strategies as well.

While observing in Miss Apple’s classroom she had students work in centers in which play was incorporated; however, it was teacher-directed play. The students worked in two different centers, one of the centers incorporated play-based learning where the students tossed a bean bag onto letter sounds and had to say the sound of the letter sound that they threw their bean bag onto. What was done at the second center? Throughout the day, however, most of the time Miss Apple led her students using didactic instruction.

During the observations in Miss Brown’s morning and afternoon class, the responses she gave during the interviews were mirrored in her classroom. Miss Brown did not have many opportunities for play-based learning in her classroom. She allowed students to play at centers if they finished their centers. The centers included a block area, a writing center, listening center,
and a computer center. During the morning class only four students finished in time to play, with, at most, only ten minutes to explore their center. In the afternoon class, the majority of the class finished their workshop activities and had about fifteen minutes to explore in their center. Overall, the medium value Miss Brown placed on play according to her responses during the interviews was viewed in her classroom.

Research Question Two: What Strategies do Kindergarten Teachers use to Implement Play-Based Learning into Their Curriculum?

Quantitative results.

Quantitative results for the second research question were derived from survey question 10. Responses were probed by the question, *what strategies do you use to implement play into your classroom?* Figure 2 depicts the responses of the survey participants and the strategies they provided for implementing play into their classroom. The majority, 36%, of the full-day and half-day kindergarten teachers said they used *learning centers*, 30% reported that they used *games*, 28% said that they implemented *hands-on/exploratory learning*, and lastly, 6% responded that they used *play centers/free-choice centers*.

![Strategies to Implement Play into the Classroom](image)
Figure 2. What strategies do you use to implement play into your classroom? This figure represents the strategies that full-day and half-day kindergarten teachers use to implement play into their classrooms.

Qualitative results.

The qualitative results were formulated for this research question by one interview question and the observations that were conducted in both the full-day and half-day kindergarten. In the pre interview the researcher asked Miss Apple and Miss Brown, How do you implement play-based learning into your curriculum? Table 4 shows their responses.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you implement play-based learning into your curriculum?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Math manipulatives, free exploration, dramatic play, centers, and games, songs, puppets, and group work.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miss Apple and Miss Brown responded with several strategies that they use to implement play-based learning, such as manipulatives, songs, and centers. Through the observation of Miss Apple’s classroom, other strategies were seen as well. She used songs, puppets, and group work to implement play-based learning into her classroom. From the observations of Miss Brown’s classroom, strategies to incorporate play were identified that she did not include in her interview response. Miss Brown used manipulatives, such as counting frogs for math, songs with an educational purpose (e.g., The Phonics Dance), and an activity that helped develop gross motor
skills where the students walked heel-to-toe on alphabet letters. The play strategies that Miss Brown stated in her interview were also seen throughout the day in her classroom, as well as a variety of non-play strategies.

**Research Question Three: What Outside Influences and Pressures do Kindergarten Teachers Feel May Affect the Amount of Play-Based Learning That Occurs In Their Classroom?**

**Quantitative results.**

The quantitative results for research question three were gathered from survey question 7. The survey participants were prompted to answer, *Do you feel pressure from outside influences on the amount of play you can include in your curriculum?* Figure 3 represents the responses that were given by participants. The largest, with 27 teachers, reported that *Ohio Academic Content Standards* influence the amount of play in their curriculum, followed by 16 teachers stating that the *Curriculum Pacing Guide* influences their curriculum, 14 reporting *high-stakes* testing influenced play, 13 responding that *district administration* affects the amount of play in their curriculum, eight claiming they feel pressure from *assigned textbooks*, and four responding that they are influenced by their *principal*. Furthermore, four teachers reported that *other teachers, including kindergarten teachers*, influence the amount of play in their curriculum. Lastly, three teachers conveyed that *parents* influence the amount of play in their curriculum.
Figure 3. Teacher’s responses to the question, “Do you feel pressures from outside influences on the amount of play you can include in your curriculum?” N = 32. Open response question in which respondents could identify more than one influence. Survey participants were also asked the question, _Do you think there is enough time to include play into your classroom instruction on a daily basis?_ The participants responded with 38% (12 participants) stating that there was enough time to include play daily and 66% (21 participants) said that they could not incorporate play into their daily instruction.

**Qualitative results**

The qualitative results for research question three were derived from the interview question, _What do you see as the reason why play-based learning is decreasing in kindergarten classrooms across the nation?_ Miss Apple and Miss Brown's responses are shown in Table 5.
Table 5

*What do you see as the reason why play-based learning is decreasing in kindergarten classrooms across the nation?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</th>
<th>Miss Brown (Half-Day Teacher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “Parent expectations, time restraints, and state and district expectations.”</td>
<td>• “Standards and the time allotted are the reasons why play-based learning is decreasing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown believed that higher expectations are a reason why play is decreasing in kindergarten. Furthermore during the observation of Miss Apple’s kindergarten, some of these higher expectations were seen. During the observation she completed a standardized writing test in which the students were required to write a complete sentence with appropriate punctuation, capitalization, a verb, and a noun. In addition, the students were given a social studies test on Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

In Miss Brown’s classroom observations, no formal assessments were seen, however, it was obvious that they were on a time crunch. Miss Brown constantly reminded children about the time they had and they quickly moved from activity to activity. It seems that the lack of time and standards influenced the amount of play-based learning Miss Apple and Miss Brown could incorporate into their classrooms.
Research Question Four: How do the Perceptions of Full- and Half-Day Kindergarten Teachers Compare?

Quantitative results.

Quantitative results from the survey show that 20 of the participants teach in a full-day setting, while 12 teach in a half-day kindergarten setting. The 20 full-day teachers were evenly divided on the question of whether there is enough time to incorporate play into their classroom on a daily basis, with ten teachers reporting there was enough time to incorporate play, and ten indicating there was not enough time. Of the 12 half-day teachers, two participants (17%) said there was enough time to incorporate play in their classroom on a daily basis and ten (83%) said there was not enough time. Thus, over 50% of the full-day teachers and over 75% of the half-day teachers feel they do not have time to include play-based learning in their classrooms.

Qualitative results.

The qualitative results for this research question were answered through observation and the interview question, *What advantages and disadvantages do you see with half and full-day kindergarten?* Miss Apple and Miss Brown’s responses are shown in Table 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miss Apple (Full-Day Teacher)</th>
<th>Miss Brown (Half-Day Teacher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “In half-day there is not enough time for content to be covered, only the basics, there is no time for science, social studies, or recess.”</td>
<td>• “In half-day there is less planning, parents are more comfortable only leaving their children for half of the day, and the cost is lower.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “In full-day kindergarten there is time for centers, quality time with students, recess, and more time to work on academics.”</td>
<td>• “In half-day the day is rushed and the children barely have time to play.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miss Apple and Miss Brown both discussed the lack of time in a half-day kindergarten setting. Additionally, Miss Apple described the benefits of full-day kindergarten and that the teacher has more quality time with her students because she has one group of students per day, not two. Furthermore, Miss Brown described the advantages to half-day kindergarten: there is less planning time for the teacher because you teach the same thing twice, the cost is lower, and parents tend to be more comfortable leaving their children for a smaller portion of the day.

During the interviews both teachers were asked, *Which kindergarten setting do you prefer, half-day or full-day?* Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown stated that they prefer full-day kindergarten.
The classroom observations confirmed the perceptions of full-day and half-day kindergartens that Miss Apple and Miss Brown discussed in the interviews. In Miss Apple’s full-day kindergarten class, the students had time for science, social studies, recess, and centers. In Miss Brown’s half-day kindergarten class, social studies and science instruction were not observed, nor was recess. Centers were available only to students who finished their work early. Miss Brown constantly reminded the class that they were running out of time when working on assignments, thus showing the lack of time in a half-day kindergarten setting to successfully finish all assignments.

**Summary**

The results within this chapter were aligned with the study’s research questions. The quantitative results and qualitative results for research question 1 seemed to verify each another. Although the results from the survey were varied, 81% of the participants rated the value of play-based learning in a kindergarten classroom as important or very important. Moreover, Miss Apple, the full-day kindergarten teacher, believed play to be important to incorporate on a daily basis: however, on the day of the observation, much of the day was spent on teacher-directed instruction. On the other hand, Miss Brown, the half-day kindergarten teacher, believed that play was somewhat important and remained relatively neutral about it during her interviews, suggesting that play should be used along with other strategies. Approximately, 16% of survey participants also rated play as somewhat important. During the observation, Miss Brown used a small amount of student-directed play along with other strategies throughout her day, thus bearing out the position she stated during the interview.

The second research question inquired about the strategies kindergarten teachers used to implement play-based learning into their classrooms. The survey responses included learning
centers, games, hands-on explorations, and free-choice or play centers. Miss Apple and Miss Brown interview responses paralleled the survey responses: centers, games, and manipulatives, whose use is a hands-on leaning strategy.

Results for the third research question evaluated the outside influences that kindergarten teachers feel affect the amount of play-based learning that occurs in their classroom. The results from the survey indicated that most teachers feel that the Ohio Academic Content Standards affect their decision to not incorporate play. Miss Apple and Miss Brown also stated that standards influence their curriculum. The responses from the survey and interviews strongly suggest that standards are the largest influence on teachers. In addition, Miss Apple stated that parents influenced her, but only three survey participants (9%) shared this answer. Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown stated that time was a reason why they could not implement as much play-based learning activities. The majority of the participants on the survey also said there was not enough time to incorporate play into their classroom.

The results for the final research question evaluated teachers’ perceptions of full- and half-day kindergarten. The survey results indicated that 50% of full-day teachers believe there is enough time for play, whereas only 17% of half-day teachers believed there is enough time for play. Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown agreed that in half-day kindergarten there is not enough time to cover all of the required material, much less time for play. In full-day kindergarten students have the opportunity to explore subjects more deeply without constantly rushing and with more time for play-based learning. Lastly, Miss Apple and Miss Brown agreed that their preferred kindergarten setting is full-day because of its advantages.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

Play is an important aspect in the kindergarten curriculum. It enables children to learn through exploration, develop social and emotional skills, as well as help children develop physically. However, play-based learning is not conducted as much in today’s kindergartens as it was in the past. Therefore, this study was designed to research perspectives of full-day and half-day kindergarten teacher’s beliefs of play in the classroom. As depicted in the literature, there are many influences pushing play out of the curriculum, primarily content standards and the focus on academic success and standardized testing (Miller & Almon, 2009). The research conducted in this study was done through a mixed-method approach to discover the answers to the four research questions.

A quantitative survey was given to 32 kindergarten teachers to understand their perspectives of play in kindergarten. To further the study, a full-day and a half day kindergarten teacher were interviewed and observed in their classroom. Both teachers took part in a pre-interview prior to the classroom observation and a post-interview after the observation. After analyzing the data from the survey, interviews, and classroom observations the results supported each other and mirrored those found nationally.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the four research questions will be shared by each question to sustain readability and simplicity. The quantitative and qualitative results will be discussed for each research question. Intertwining the quantitative and qualitative results allows for a further understanding of the research questions with the results that were formulated.
Research Question One: How Much Value do Kindergarten Teachers Place on Play-Based Learning?

The survey results indicated that most of the survey participants (47%) deemed play as an important element in the kindergarten curriculum followed by 34% stating that play was very important. Moreover, 15% of the survey participants remained neutral on the topic and 3% reported that play was very unimportant. Together, 81% of the survey participants deemed play as an important aspect to kindergarten.

The results from the interviews echoed the results of the surveys. Both Miss Brown and Miss Apple deemed play as important. The teachers claimed that play was an important aspect of kindergarten; however, a limited amount of play was seen in the classroom observations. Meisels and Shonkoff, (2000) would confirm this practice because they discuss that kindergarten classrooms are beginning to resemble first grade classrooms that focus on reading and mathematics instruction rather than the development of social skills and play. Warner and Parker (2005) state, “Play is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones” (p. 2).

These results bring the question, if play is an important aspect and has been proven to be developmentally appropriate why are kindergarten teachers not using it? The teachers are focused on meeting standards and doing well on assessments. In order to encourage teachers to implement play-based strategies in their classroom the teacher must properly know how to and the developmental benefits this will bring his/her students.
Research Question Two: What Strategies do Kindergarten Teachers use to Implement Play-Based Learning into Their Curriculum?

Research question one established that kindergarten teachers generally believe that play is an important but under-utilized element in the kindergarten curriculum. Research question two investigated the kinds of play-based strategies kindergarten teachers do implement into their curriculum. Quantitative results from the survey showed that the participants used learning centers, games, hands-on/exploration, and play centers or free-choice time as strategies to implement play into their curriculum.

The qualitative results from the interviews and observations supported the survey responses. In interviews, both Miss Apple and Miss Brown stated that they used centers and games to implement play-based learning. Through observation of both the full-day and half-day kindergarten, however, other strategies were also observed, such as hands-on learning, songs, and puppet play.

Graue (2010) discussed what a play-based kindergarten classroom might look and sound like. She stated, “A kindergarten is an active place, with children engaged in a variety of real activities. It vacillates between the noise of learning and the quiet of concentration, between structured activities led by the teacher and those chosen by students” (p. 31). In addition, she averred that when play is implemented correctly in a classroom it can help students learn multiple concepts simultaneously. Rieber, Smith, and Noah (1998) stated, “Experienced teachers are often able to invoke play and channel it toward achieving goals and objectives within the curriculum” (p. 33). Furthermore, they discussed the benefits of educational games and the instructional benefits that are derived from them which include practical reasoning skills and high motivation (p.34). In addition, Rivera (2009) reported that, “A play-deprived
environment in which children rely too much on ‘screen time’- video games, television, movies, computer-based diversion - to fill their time is sterile and seldom draws upon creativity” (p, 51).

In a classroom, screen time might include overhead transparencies, SMARTBoards, computerized instruction, and educational videos. Rivera added that with games and activities a skilled teacher can introduce an unknown subject to a hesitant learner and allow the student to practice until mastery is gained.

**Research Question Three: What Outside Influences and Pressures do Kindergarten Teachers Feel May Affect the Amount of Play-Based Learning that Occurs in Their Classroom?**

The third research question was designed to understand why kindergarten teachers do not implement play-based learning into their classroom. It is apparent that kindergarten teachers deem play as an important element; however, many teachers do not implement play at all or find it difficult to incorporate play into their classroom.

The quantitative results from the survey show that the majority of participants believed that The Ohio Academic Content Standards negatively influence their decision to include play, followed by curriculum pacing guides, high-stakes testing, district administration, principals, other kindergarten teachers, other teachers, and parents. The survey also indicated that over two-thirds of the respondents believed that they could not include play on a daily basis in their classroom while only roughly one-third stated that they did have enough time.

The qualitative results from the interviews supported the survey responses. Miss Apple and Miss Brown stated that standards and time are huge factors that influence the amount of play they can include in their curriculum. The results of this study have been observed on a national level as well. Myck-Wayne (2010) stated that our nation’s education continues to shift toward a
curriculum encumbered by curricula standards-based instruction and standardized tests and, at the same time, play is being squeezed out of education. Moreover, Miller and Almon (2009) reported that “Kindergarteners are now under intense pressure to meet inappropriate expectations, including academic standards that until recently were reserved for second grade,” (p. 1). In agreement, Nicolopoulou (2010) stated, “Across the board, play is being displaced by a single-minded focus on teaching academic skills through direct-instruction. This emphasis on more didactic, academic, and content-based approaches to education comes at the expense of more child-centered, play-oriented, and constructivist approaches” (p.1). Thus, this study, supports what has been observed nation-wide. Although there are many outside influences that affect the amount of play implemented into the kindergarten classroom today, the most influential and stifling is high-stakes, standardized testing that compels most kindergarten teachers to resort to didactic, teacher-centered instruction.

Research Question Four: How do the Perceptions of Full- and Half-Day Kindergartens Compare?

The fourth and final research question was designed to gain a further understanding of the perceptions of full-and half-day kindergarten teachers. The results for this question were gathered from quantitative and qualitative data. Both Miss Apple and Miss Brown agreed that full-day kindergarten is their preferred setting. Although Miss Brown and Miss Apple discussed the plusses and minuses of both settings, both types of attributes revolved around the time frame. Both teachers said that in full-day there was time to cover content, but in half-day it was extremely difficult and, sometimes impossible, to cover all of the content. Thus, both the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that there is not enough time to cover materials in half-day kindergarten and to prepare students for first grade. Agreeing with the lack of time in half-
day kindergarten are Lee et. al., (2006) when they discussed the value of full-day kindergarten. They stated, “A longer school day provides educational support that ensures a productive beginning school experience and increases the chances of future school success” (p. 169). Thus, this research project supports other studies that have demonstrated that the lack of time teachers feel due to the pressure to address mandated standards in full-day and especially half-day kindergarten settings is leading teachers to implement skill and drill practice and eliminate play from their curriculum.

**Implications**

The results of this study have significant implications for kindergarten teachers, full-day and half-day, as well as their students. For teachers to relinquish their teacher-centered strategies in favor of child-centered play-based strategies, it is crucial for teachers to understand the benefits and the research behind play-based learning. Moreover, they need to educate themselves on strategies that they can use to implement play-based learning into their classroom while providing academic rigor. Although this study focused on kindergarten, the strategies discussed could be used for teaching children in any grade. Likewise, educators and administrators can use the results of this research study and the literature cited to begin to support, plan and implement play into their kindergarten curriculum knowing that academic expectations can be met and, in addition, nurture the holistic development of children. Identifying and understanding the outside influences and pressures felt by kindergarten teachers as they make curricular decisions sets the stage for teachers and administrators to work together to development and implement a play-based, child-centered curriculum that is also academic rigorous.
Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers should be familiar with research related to the curricular and instructional decisions they make, such as why they teach math using manipulatives or why they level readers in language arts. They should be able to provide ample justification for the teaching strategies they employ. Kindergarten teachers should continue to educate themselves on new strategies and methods to incorporate play-based learning into their curriculum. This will empower teachers to effectively explain and justify their teaching methods or desire to veer away from teacher-centered, didactic instruction. Additionally, this knowledge of the research can make kindergarten teachers important partners to work with administrators to implement a play-based curriculum.

Recommendations for Administrations

By providing teachers with professional development in play-based learning, administrators would benefit the children, school, district and community. There is ample research to demonstrate that play fosters healthy development of children’s cognitive, social, emotional, psychological and physical domains (Ashiabi, 2007; Lee et al., 2006). Play nurtures problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity. Numerous studies have shown that literacy skills, including reading, are developed through play. An opportunity for teachers to partake in a workshop or seminar on play-based learning would allow them to understand the beneficial elements of play-based learning on the development of children. In addition, professional development would ensure that all teachers were provided with the same information and could collaborate with one another in order to strategize and create ideas.
Recommendations for Further Study

Based upon the findings of this study, a number of areas for further research were identified. For example, studies could expand the scope of this project to include strategies to implement play-based learning in all levels of schooling not just in kindergarten. In addition, the results indicated that standards and high-stakes testing affected the amount of play-based learning implemented into the classroom. Additional research could be done to discover other methods of upholding children to expectations but without standards and testing. Teachers and administrators are reluctant to give up didactic, teacher-centered instructional practices. A large, broad-based study that compared the academic performance children learning in play-based classrooms versus didactic classrooms would shed some much needed light on this topic. However, because numerous variables would have to be accounted for, such a study would be difficult to carry out.

Conclusions

There is a substantial body of research suggesting that kindergarten teachers should implement play into their curriculum (Cannon et al. 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Ray& Smith, 2010). According to this study, kindergarten teachers deemed play as being important. However, this belief was not strong enough for teachers to make play a significant part of their curriculum when compared to the pressures they feel from outside influences that negatively impact the amount of play in the kindergarten curriculum, such as standards, time, and high-stakes testing. These findings support those of other studies (Lee et. al., 2006; Ray & Smith 2010;). Graue (2010) went on to state that, “The current focus on benchmarks and achievement has focused effort on what is tested rather than on what is being learned” (p. 30). The play-based strategies that teachers in this study indicated they most frequently used include learning centers, games,
hands-on exploration, and play centers or free-choice centers; however, these are just a small sample of strategies that can be used. Teachers and administrators interested in implementing the kinds of play-based instructional strategies discussed in this study should refer to the citations to read more about how to implement them in their own classrooms.
REFERENCES


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Ohio Department of Education. (2011). *All-day every-day kindergarten Waiver for state fiscal years 2012 and 2013.*


Survey of Play-based Learning in Kindergarten

For completion of this survey please use the following definition of play.

Play: An activity that allows students to explore and learn and at the same time is an activity that is internally motivating, self-stimulating, engaging, and has an overall learning purpose.

1. How many years have you taught kindergarten?
   a. 1-3 years
   b. 4-7 years
   c. 8-11 years
   d. 12+

2. What is your current kindergarten setting?
   a. Full-day
   b. Half-day

3. Have you had the opportunity to teach in both half-day and full-day kindergarten?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. What level of importance do you believe it is for kindergarten students to learn through play-based activities?
   a. Very Important
   b. Important
   c. Neutral
   d. Unimportant
   e. Very Unimportant

5. Do you think there is enough time to include play into your classroom instruction on a daily basis?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. How much time do students have for play-based learning on a daily basis in your classroom?
   a. 0
   b. 1 hour
   c. 2 hours
   d. 3+
7. Do you feel pressures from outside influences on the amount of play you can include in your curriculum? If so, what are the outside influences?

   a. District Administration  
   b. High-Stakes Testing  
   c. Parents  
   d. Principal  
   e. Other Kindergarten Teachers  
   f. Other Teachers  
   g. Assigned Textbooks  
   h. Curriculum Pacing Guide  
   i. Ohio Academic Content Standards

8. Do you think there are different pressures or different degrees of pressure that half-day and full-day kindergarten teachers feel when selecting teaching strategies? If so, what do you believe are the most important reasons for this difference?

   a. No Difference  
   b. Amount of Instructional Time  
   c. Expectations of Grade One Teachers  
   d. Expectations of Principals  
   e. Expectations of Parents  
   f. Self-imposed Pressure by Teacher with no Legitimate Reason  
   g. Amount of time for Teacher’s to Learn Novel Instructional Approaches  
   h. High-Stakes Testing

9. What strategies do you use to implement play into your classroom? (e.g. educational games, learning centers, hand-on exploration activities that have an educational purpose, etc.)
APPENDIX B
Informed Consent for Play-based Learning in Kindergarten Survey

Introduction: Thank you for reviewing this email. My name is Rachel Chervenak. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum and Teaching program at Bowling Green State University. I am currently working on my thesis. I am interested in discovering how kindergarten teachers incorporate play-based learning activities into their classroom with the higher expectations for school readiness and increasing demands imposed by content standards and high-stakes testing. I hope that you can take a couple of minutes to complete this survey.

Purpose: The purpose of the survey is to find out more about half-day and full-day kindergarten teachers and how play-based learning is implemented into kindergarten. This information will contribute to our understanding of the curricular and instructional decisions made by kindergarten teachers.

Procedure: I request that you take a 9-question survey using a survey tool called Survey Monkey. I estimate that your participation will take less than 5 minutes. Your participation will involve reading 9 questions and selecting the response that best matches your opinion. The last question on the survey will allow for your own unique response as to the strategies you use in your classroom. You will be sent directly to the survey by clicking this link: [URL to Survey Monkey]. Following the completion of the survey you should clear browser cache.

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your future relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection: I will never possess paperwork with your name or other identifying information related to this survey. Your survey answers will be stored temporarily on the Survey Monkey website. This is a secure website used by many institutions across the country. Your answers will then be downloaded to a password protected computer. I will be the only person that will have access to your answers. Because you do not identify yourself in the survey, there is no way to trace the answers you provide directly back to you. In my thesis, I will only use the combined information from all persons who took the survey and not an individual’s answers.

Risks: The anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life. You are using a computer to record your opinions about play-based learning in kindergarten.

Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about the research or your participation in the research, you can contact Rachel Chervenak (440-862-4011, Chervenak@bgsu.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Woroch (419-372-7365, eworoch@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. I am very grateful for your time.
Completion as consent: By completing this survey and clicking the "submit" button in Survey Monkey you are indicating your consent to participate in this study.
Signed Consent for
Pre Interview:
Play-Based Learning in Kindergarten: Half-day and Full-day Teacher’s Perspectives

Introduction: I am currently working on my thesis in the Curriculum and Teaching graduate program at Bowling Green State University. I am studying play-based learning in a full-day and half-day kindergarten.

Purpose: The purpose of the pre interview is to determine your beliefs and attitude towards play-based learning in kindergarten. The results of the interview will help me to understand your perspectives of play-based of play-based learning, the instructional strategies you use in your classroom, and what pressures or outside influences you face that may affect the way you teach in your classroom.

Procedure: I will ask you 9 guiding questions. Follow-up questions may be asked to clarify your responses or otherwise gain additional insight regarding your thoughts and feelings. The conversation will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. It should take no more than 1 hour to complete the interview.

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any question and terminate this interview at any time. You are also free to withdraw your participation in the study at any later time. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your future relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection: Keeping your participation in this study confidential is important. Your name will not appear on any documents or in the thesis itself. This consent form with your name and signature will be securely locked in a file cabinet. The information will be kept for one year and then shredded. I will be the only person that will have access to the digital voice recorded tape and interview notes. A pseudonym will be used throughout the text of the thesis to protect your anonymity.

Risks: The anticipated risks to you are no greater than risks you may have on a daily basis.

initials
Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about the research or your participation in the research, you can contact Rachel Chervenak (440-862-4011, Cherver@bgsu.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Woroch (419-372-7365, eworoch@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrp@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. I am very grateful for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Name

Participant's Signature ________________ Date ________________
APPENDIX D
Signed Consent for
Post Interview:
Play-Based Learning in Kindergarten: Half-day and Full-day Teacher’s Perspectives

Introduction: I am currently working on my thesis in the Curriculum and Teaching graduate program at Bowling Green State University. I am studying play-based learning in a full-day and half-day kindergarten.

Purpose: The purpose of post interview is to discuss what I observed in your classroom and the strategies you used to incorporate play-based learning. The results of the study will help me to understand your perspectives of play-based learning, the instructional, the strategies you use in your classroom, and what pressures or outside influences you face that may affect the way you teach in your classroom.

Procedure: Following the school day that I observe in your classroom, I will conduct a post interview with you that has 4 guiding questions. Follow-up questions may be asked to help to clarify your responses or otherwise gain additional insight into your thoughts and feelings. The conversation will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. The post interview should take no longer than 1 hour to complete.

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any question and terminate this interview at any time. You are also free to withdraw your participation in the study at any later time. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your future relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection: Keeping your participation in this study confidential is important. Your name will not appear on any documents or in the thesis itself. This consent form with your name and signature will be securely locked in a file cabinet. The information will be kept for one year and then shredded. I will be the only person that will have access to the digital voice recorded tape and interview notes. A pseudonym will be used throughout the text of the thesis to protect your anonymity.

Risks: The anticipated risks to you are no greater than risks you may have on a daily basis.

initials
Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about the research or your participation in the research, you can contact Rachel Chervenak (440-862-4011, Chervenk@bgsu.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Worch (419-372-7365, eworchi@bgsu.edu).
You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or herb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. I am very grateful for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

__________________________________________
Participant Name

__________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

__________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX E
Signed Consent for
Classroom Observation:
Play-Based Learning in Kindergarten: Half-day and Full-day Teacher’s Perspectives

Introduction: I am currently working on my thesis in the Curriculum and Teaching graduate program at Bowling Green State University. I am studying play-based learning in a full-day and half-day kindergarten.

Purpose: The purpose for observing in your classroom is to get an understanding of your daily routine and the instructional strategies you implement into your classroom. The results of the study will help me to understand your perspectives of play-based learning, the instructional strategies you use in your classroom, and what pressures or outside influences you face that may affect the way you teach in your classroom.

Procedure: I will observe in your classroom for one full school day. I will be following an observation protocol and taking notes on what I observe throughout the school day.

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your future relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection: Keeping your participation in this study confidential is important. Your name will not appear on any documents or in the thesis itself. This consent form with your name and signature will be securely locked in a file cabinet. The information will be kept for one year and then shredded. I will be the only person that will have access to the observation notes and protocol. A pseudonym will be used throughout the text of the thesis to protect your anonymity.

Risks: The anticipated risks to you are no greater than risks you may have on a daily basis.

Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about the research or your participation in the research, you can contact Rachel Chervenak (440-862-4011, Chervenak@bgsu.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Woroch (419-372-7365, eworoch@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. I am very grateful for your time.

initials
I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Name

Participant’s Signature

Date
APPENDIX F
Pre-Interview Questions

These interview questions will be used as guiding questions. From responses further questions may ensue.

1. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?
   a. Do you teach in a half-day or full-day setting?

2. What advantages and disadvantages do you see with half and full-day kindergarten?
   a. What is your preference?

3. How do you divide your instructional time among different content areas (Reading, mathematics, language arts, social studies, and science)?
   a. On what basis have you made these decisions?
   b. Has the amount of time affected your use of instructional strategies?

4. Do you believe play-based learning should be included in the kindergarten curriculum?
   a. How might play be used to develop reading, language arts, and mathematic skills?
   b. How much time do you believe a student should have for play-based learning on a daily basis?

5. Do you think that allowing children the opportunity for play-based learning benefits their development?
   a. In what ways?

6. Since you’ve been teaching, what changes have you seen in the kindergarten curriculum? a. Teaching strategies
   b. Curriculum
   c. Assessment
   d. Accountability
e. Class size

7. What do you see as the reason why play-based learning is decreasing in kindergarten classrooms across the nation?
   a. There is substantial data to show that play simultaneously develops multiple cognitive, social and emotional benefits. Why do kindergarten teachers today tend to include fewer play-based learning activities?
   b. Is there enough time to incorporate play?
   c. Is play no longer deemed effective by kindergarten teachers?
   d. What evidence have you seen to show that non-play teaching strategies are successful?

8. How do you implement play-based learning into your curriculum? (If they do not, how could you…)
   a. Is play-based learning part of your everyday curriculum?
   b. If not, is this a purposeful decision made by you, your kindergarten team, or the principal?
   c. Under what circumstances might you consider using play-based teaching strategies in the future?
Post-Interview Questions

These are the interview questions I will ask following observing in the teacher’s classroom.

These questions are guiding questions with possible follow-up questions that may ensue given the response of the teacher.

1. Based on the play-based activities I saw in your classroom, can you tell me why you used this strategy to implement play into your classroom?
   a. Do you use other strategies to implement play into your classroom?

2. If you could, would you have implemented more play-based activities into your classroom?
   a. Why do you feel you could not implement more play-based activities?

3. What value do you put on using play-based learning activities into your classroom on a daily basis?
   a. Are there other learning strategies you use in your classroom that are not play-based?
   b. Are there specific strategies that you believe students learn the easiest from?

4. In the first interview I had with you, you gave some of the disadvantages and advantages of half-day and full-day kindergarten, do you believe that it would be easier to implement play-based learning in a half-day (or full-day) kindergarten?
   a. What disadvantages do you think were prevalent today that may have affected the amount of play-based learning you were able to incorporate into your classroom?
## Observation Protocol

**School Name:** __________________________

**Teacher Observing:** __________________________

**Date of Observation:** __________________________

**Full-day/Half-day:** __________________________

What does the classroom atmosphere *feel* like?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What does the classroom atmosphere *look* like?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

__Looking for:__ | __What I observed:__
---|---

1. Daily schedule of events: what is the daily schedule in the classroom

2. How much instructional time is spent on math, language arts, science, and social studies
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teacher-directed play: examples and amount of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Student-directed play: examples and amount of time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Teacher's strategies to implement play</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. How much time is spent on didactic instruction? What are the students and teacher doing during this time?</td>
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