IMPROVING ORAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION DURING PLAYTIME:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

BY

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Abstract

No one would disagree that young children's literacy learning is of primary importance in the early childhood years. One of the best ways for children to learn oral language is through play. However, many teachers view play as a child's work and not as a space where the teacher can support children's literacy learning. This study investigated the implementation of a professional development initiative that sought to help teachers at a preschool become more intentional in their interactions with children during play. The overall question framing this qualitative study was: "What happens when I implement a PD program focused on improving the teaching of vocabulary and oral language during playtime?" This question was examined in two ways. One line of inquiry focused on what the PD initiative looked like in action. The second line of inquiry focused on three teachers' literacy beliefs and practices of playtime before, during, and after the PD intervention.

The sample for this study was comprised of three teachers who participated in a 3-month professional development initiative. Data collection consisted of observations through the administration of the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) (Smith, Davidson, Weisenfeld & Dennis, 2001) and through the use of field notes. Teacher-generated reflections were completed after each PD workshop session. The teachers were also interviewed before and after the PD. An analysis of the PD was completed using the theoretical framework to capture specific aspects of the curriculum. To provide a descriptive portrait of each teacher a mini case study analysis was completed.

It was found that the teachers' responses to the professional development were mediated by their beliefs about teaching, play, and literacy development. Effective aspects of the professional development included the use of protocols and the opportunity to work together. In

order to have more of an impact on teachers' practices the professional development model requires revisions in timing of delivery and curriculum content as well as the addition of a coaching component. The findings of this study have also been used to inform adoption of a new, more play-focused curriculum at the preschool.

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believing in me and showing me anything is possible, and for always encouraging me to do it my

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Cranbury Presbyterian Nursery School.

To the Cranbury Presbyterian Nursery School Board for their support and commitment to my years of course work, to the research for this dissertation, and entrusting me as the leader of such an amazing preschool for young children.

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To the families of the Cranbury Presbyterian Nursery School who have shared in their children's preschool years and continue to bring their children to the Cranbury Presbyterian Nursery School, always believing that our school provides their children with the best foundation for their academic future success. To the children who continue to amaze and impress me, and for all they do to put a smile on my face and warm my heart.

To the First Presbyterian Church, the staff members, and many volunteers that support this Christian preschool experience for so many children.

"'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder
them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these…
Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a
little child will never enter it.' And Jesus took the children
in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them."

Mark 10:14-16

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Almost fifty percent of three-year-and four-year-old children in the United States participate in preschool programs (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). The accrued evidence shows that high quality preschool experiences have positive impacts on young children's cognitive and social development (Barnett, 1995; Barnett, 2008; Gromley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2005; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford & Barbarin, 2008; Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, Early & Howes, 2008; Reynolds & Ou, 2004; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2004). Longitudinal evidence collected on participants in the High Scope Perry Preschool Project for example, show that participation in a high quality preschool experience is predictive of increased employment and earnings, as well as a decrease in dependency on welfare, and reduced arrests (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005). More recent state evaluations like the Abbott Preschool Longitudinal Effects Study have found positive effects on children's learning through the end of 2nd grade in the domains of language, literacy and math (Frede, Jung, Barnett & Figueras, 2009). In a study of 2,439 children participating in preschool programs from eleven states, Mashburn et al., (2008) found that the higher the quality of the teacher-child interactions, the higher the social competence of children, and the lower the problem behaviors (Mashburn et al., 2008). The short and long term benefits documented in these various studies are only evident in high quality programs.

What is High Quality?

High quality preschool programs are comprised of both structural and process variables (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006). Structural elements are those typically regulated, such as teacher child ratios, class size, as well as the qualifications and compensation of teachers and staff (Howes et al., 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Process variables are observed at the classroom level. These are actual classroom experiences, including things such as teacher and child interactions, curriculum, resources available to children, and classroom climate (Howes et al., 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2009).

Research indicates that programs of a higher quality have smaller class sizes and fewer children per teacher, which provides more opportunities for individualized instruction (Espinosa, 2002). Higher quality programs tend to be staffed by better-educated teachers, typically those with a Bachelor's degree and a specialization in early childhood education, who ensure that children are engaged in a challenging and developmentally appropriate curriculum. High quality programs also use a comprehensive, research-based curriculum. The curricula that have been found to have long term effects are those that allow opportunities for children to learn in and through play (Gerber, Whitebook, & Weinstein, 2007; Howes, 2000; Howes, James & Ritchie, 2003; Mashburn et al., 2008). Many studies provide evidence that playful learning is correlated with positive academic outcomes (Berk & Singer, 2009; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2012; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith & Palmquist, 2013). Most early childhood curricula therefore provide space and time in the daily schedule for play assuming that this opportunity allows children to construct and extend their understandings of the world. For example, the High Scope and Creative Curriculum provide at a minimum one-hour of free play-time every day in addition to small group and teacher directed activities.

Playtime in early childhood classrooms is considered to be the period of time when children are able to explore, discover, and learn about their world by interacting in the indoor and outdoor educational environments. During this time teachers tend to take a more facilitative rather than an authoritative role in children's learning. In play, "children are active agents who reflect on and coordinate their own thoughts, rather than merely absorbing those of others" (Berk, 2006, p. 627).

Children engage in many types of play including gross and fine motor play, cognitive play, and socio-dramatic play (Frost et al., 2012). The most beneficial play is purposeful, complex, and engaging (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009). During this type of play children learn to problem solve, become critical and creative thinkers and learn valuable social skills. Purposeful and engaging play just does not happen; teachers need to be intentional about how children are exposed to rich, meaningful play within the classroom environment. Teachers need to talk with children during play, to extend their thinking and engagement with key ideas. Extended conversations that are meaningful help children stay on task, solve problems, ask more open-ended questions and use more sophisticated vocabulary (Klenk, 2001; Pelligrini, 1984; Roskos & Christie, 2004). Play is an important vehicle for promoting language during early childhood, and a developmentally appropriate way of teaching a range of skills and knowledge (NAEYC, 2013). In high quality learning environments therefore, effective teachers establish an environment rich in materials, and experiences, and encourage children to explore that environment and their own ideas through play (Epstein, 2014). Intentional teaching is also necessary if children's play is to be capitalized on as a space for language learning.

Intentional Teaching, Language and Literacy

Studies of teaching in preschool have identified that effective teachers are *intentional* about all they do in early childhood programs (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Pianta has defined intentionality as "directed, designed interactions between children and teachers in which teachers purposefully challenge, scaffold, and extend children's skills" (Pianta, 2003, p. 5). The intentional teacher is very aware of what children are doing during play and picks up on the learning opportunities children are engaging in. These teachers are able to suggest new ways of moving forward with children's thinking and are conscious of the different academic learning children are doing. The intentional teacher is continually assessing each child's progress and adjusting his/her strategies to meet each child's individual needs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Epstein, 2014).

National and statewide studies of early childhood teaching however, tend to show that teachers often miss opportunities to teach academic content while children are playing and that they are often unaware of these missed opportunities (Maxwell, Early, Bryant, Kraus, Hume & Crawford, 2009; Phillips, Gormely & Lowenstein, 2009). This lack of awareness may be due, in part, to the assumption held by many early childhood teachers that play is the work of the child and not a space where teachers could be building on children's learning. However, teachers have a variety of roles that build children's learning through play. Teachers can take on many roles in children's play that supports their learning but does not control their talk and action. Jones and Reynolds (2011) have suggested that there are six roles that teachers take in play including being a stage manager or setting the stage for play, a planner as they must plan for children's play, as well as a scribe who documents key ideas for children to sustain their play. Teachers also need to be a mediator as they model and explain problem-solving skills, and even sometimes must become a "player" to help children expand and build on their ideas (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Finally, teachers also can be "assessors" and a "communicator" using their observations of children at play to document children's misconceptions and skills that may need developing.

Some of the most important academic teaching interactions that take place in preschool are those focused on oral language. Oral language is the ability to use words to communicate ideas and thoughts (Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). It is comprised of word knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and expressive and receptive vocabulary (Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). Vocabulary development and oral language development serve as the foundation for learning words that are used in reading and writing across all subject areas in school and beyond (Coker, 2006; Silverman & Hartranft, 2015; Snow, 1991). Since oral language is the primary means by which children learn about the academic content areas such as mathematics, science and social studies it could arguably be the most crucial area of academic focus during the early childhood years (Albert Shanker Institute, 2009).

One of the key ways children learn to use language and build their vocabulary is by engaging in meaningful conversations and interactions with adults and peers during play. In a review of 20 studies, Roskos & Christie (2004) concluded that play boosts literacy by "serving as a language experience that can build connections between oral and written modes of expression" (p. 116). Simply talking to children during play is not enough. Higher-level rich conversations are necessary to support the development of language and literacy skills in young children (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Mashburn et al., 2008). Thus teachers need to ask higher order questions and converse with children using extensive vocabulary to stimulate oral language learning (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Dickinson & Smith, 1994). However, given the research evidence to date, it seems that many preschool

teachers are reluctant to use play-based learning as a site for teaching children oral language and vocabulary skills.

Purpose

As the Director of a National Association of the Education for Young Children (NAEYC) accredited preschool, I noticed that my teaching staff were not engaging children in the kinds of higher order questioning and conversations needed to build oral language and vocabulary. During play-based instructional time, teachers tended to keep children busy with craft activities that focused on the end product, and not the process of learning. The teachers were not asking higher order questions related to the theme being taught or even the craft activity. While they were busy with children doing art/craft, children in other areas of the classroom were not being supported or scaffolded in their language skills. As a result, the conversations between the teacher and the children were limited to those that provided directions to complete the craft activity. The teachers of our four-year-old and five-year-old preschool children are certified in elementary education, not early childhood education, and have not participated recently in professional development or higher education courses in language and literacy. As a result, they may not be aware of the importance of play as a context to enhance each child's learning of early literacy skills, especially vocabulary and oral language.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine what happened when I implement a professional development program to help my early childhood teachers become more effective at intentionally teaching vocabulary and oral language during children's play time. Given what we know about the importance of language and literacy, and the learning that occurs during playtime, teachers should be engaged with children and should be providing these important learning opportunities. I am concerned that children are leaving our preschool insufficiently

prepared for the literacy demands of kindergarten. This PD intervention is intended to build the literacy and oral language strategies of my center's preschool teachers with the aim of changing how my teaching staff works with children during playtime.

Research Questions

The overall question framing this study is:

1. What happens when I implement a PD program focused on improving the teaching of vocabulary and oral language during playtime?

The following questions guide this investigation:

2. What does the curriculum of the PD look like?

    a.) What activities do the teachers participate in and how do they respond?

    b.) Which aspects of the PD do teachers say are informative to their learning?

    c.) What do the teachers say could be improved about the PD?

3. What are the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play and their role in oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after a PD intervention?

    a.) What are the teachers' beliefs about play in oral language and vocabulary development before and after participating in the PD?

    b.) What are the teachers' oral language and vocabulary practices during playtime before and after participating in the PD?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of literature examined several areas of research. First I explore the research on teaching oral language and vocabulary in the preschool years. As this study focused on how teachers can use play as a space for literacy teaching, I then reviewed what is known about play, the role teachers have in play, and the teaching of oral language and vocabulary during playtime. A final section examined the research on professional development initiatives that have been conducted to help improve preschool teachers' oral language and literacy practices. This literature informed the structure and content of the professional development initiative that was the focus of this qualitative research study.

Research on Teaching Oral Language and Vocabulary in Preschool

Research on the teaching of oral language and vocabulary in preschool tends to focus on specific strategies teachers use. One group of studies looks solely at a strategy like asking cognitively challenging questions while other studies in this area tend to examine specific instructional events (e.g. book reading) and what actions teachers take during these times that lead to improvements in children's vocabulary.

Teaching Strategies to Improve Oral language and Vocabulary

Researchers have identified the setting up of a literacy rich environment, questioning, having extended and meaningful conversations, modeling language, and explicit word teaching as techniques that contribute to improved child outcomes in vocabulary and oral language. Given the importance of books in the literacy curriculum another group of mixed-methods studies (Biemiller, 2003; Connor, Morrison & Slominski, 2006; Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Dickinson & Tabors, 1991; Hansen, 2004; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Morrow, 1985; Wasik

& Bond, 2001; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994; Zucker, Justice, Piasta & Kaderavek, 2010) examine shared book reading and what the teacher does during this instructional event that facilitates oral language and vocabulary development.

  Teacher talk. Having meaningful and extended conversations with children, in which teachers model language use, ask questions, and use new words is critical to the development of children's literacy and language skills (Girolmaetto & Weitzman, 2002; Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997). The research on this topic is mostly quantitative, and focuses on the frequency and type of strategies that teachers use to interact with children, and the kind of talk that is happening in preschool classrooms (Chen & de Groot Kim, 2014; Durden & Dangel, 2008; Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Wasik, 2012). Findings suggest that higher level talk, or extended conversations that include a wide variety of vocabulary are somewhat infrequent and at times non-existent in preschool classrooms (Justice et al., 2008; Massey, 2004; Massey et al., 2008; Smith & Dickinson, 1994).

  The learning of sophisticated vocabulary includes the meaning of the word, and connecting the word to what a child already knows (Connor et al., 2006; Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Words should be meaningful and of interest to children in order for them to have a better understanding of the new words and what they mean (Hans et al., 2005). One group of studies looks at the vocabulary used by teachers (Connor et al., 2006; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Han, Roskos, Christie, Mandzuk & Vukelich, 2005) as it is assumed that teachers who use a more varied vocabulary create a vocabulary-rich environment and help facilitate children's word learning (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

  In a longitudinal study (Dickinson & Porche, 2011) of 83, four-year-old children in 65 classrooms, children and teachers were audiotaped during large group, small group, book

reading, meal time, and free play for two days to capture all settings (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). The use of sophisticated vocabulary used by teachers was coded related to the various classroom settings (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). The Child Language Analysis (CLAN; Mac-Whinney, 1991) program was used to analyze the words used by the teachers (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Children's receptive vocabulary was assessed in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade using The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (Dunn & Dunn, 1981) (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Findings suggested that the preschool teachers' use of more sophisticated vocabulary contributed to children's emerging language and literacy skills in fourth grade (Dickinson & Porche, 2011).

A larger quantitative study by Connor et al., (2006) examined the vocabulary development of 156 preschoolers in a state-funded preschool program for children at risk for academic delays. Twenty-five teachers completed questionnaires, and informal observations were conducted throughout the year in January, February, and March (Connor et al., 2006). In addition, a half-day (approximately two hours) video-taped session was completed midyear (Connor et al., 2006). Children's vocabulary was assessed using the Woodcock-Johnson –III Tests of Achievement Picture Vocabulary test (McGrew et al., 1991; Mather & Woodcock, 2001) (Connor et al., 2006). It was observed that the teachers provided over 90 minutes of language and literacy activities in the half day programs, however the language and literacy experiences were widely different (Connor et al., 2006). During this time, teachers were providing language and literacy activities in various ways, including through play (Connor et al., 2006). The more time children spent in play was a predictor of greater vocabulary growth (Connor et al., 2006). The children that attended the preschool program more days a week showed stronger vocabulary growth (Connor et al., 2006).

Taken together these studies suggest that the opportunities teachers provide for children to hear and use more sophisticated vocabulary in their conversations have a positive impact on children (Connor et al., 2006; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Han et al., 2005).

Another powerful support of oral language for preschoolers is the ability of teachers to extend conversations and find the appropriate balance between talking and listening (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). In a longitudinal study by Smith & Dickinson, (1994), findings suggested that the nature of verbal interaction between the teacher and the children had an important impact on children's language and literacy abilities (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). Fifty-six teachers were tape recorded for a forty-minute period that included free play, large group, and small group activities (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). Teachers were also interviewed, to obtain details about their teaching practices, the language and literacy curriculum, and their views about teaching in preschool (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). The data from the teacher interviews and audio transcriptions were coded and analyzed using correlation analysis. Findings from this research suggest various contextual factors influence the opportunities for interactions between teacher and children that include the length of the preschool day, specific activity setting, and the number of children in the class (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). Free play time focused on general activities and less conversations with children, while large group time had more didactic instruction with less cognitively challenging conversations (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). This research also suggests that specific skills increase preschoolers' language and literacy abilities and teachers should be aware of these skills (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). The specific skills of pretend talk and cognitively challenging conversations, the talk that can promote language and literacy development should be used by teachers no matter what activity setting.

In addition, a series of studies were completed by Dickinson using a tool called The Teacher-Child Verbal Interaction Profile with the aim of determining the amount and quality of the teacher-child conversations (Dickinson, Howard, & Haine, 1997; Dickinson, 2001; Dickinson & McCabe, 2001, Dickinson & Tabors, 2002). Classrooms were observed during mealtime and free play and coded for teacher-child conversations (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). These studies range from longitudinal studies of eighty-five children to twenty-five classrooms, to a larger quasi-experimental comparison group design of seventy teachers over two years, all mostly within head start or low income programs. Findings suggested that two-thirds of the teachers' conversations that support language and literacy development such as expanding children's knowledge about the world, and having sustained conversations, were not provided to the children (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). This was mostly since teachers had only limited knowledge of literacy development due to the fact that many teachers have little or no college-level training related to curriculum, language and literacy (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). Teachers not only need to have the knowledge of literacy development they also need to be aware of how best to implement these strategies.

A quantitative study of 135 teachers' use of language and literacy teaching conducted in forty school districts, examined their use of the My Teaching Partner – Language & Literacy Curriculum (MTP-LL; Justice, Pullen, Hall & Pianta, 2003) (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008). Teachers were asked to implement and videotape themselves teaching six lessons beginning in mid-October until the end of the academic year (Justice et al., 2008). The data was analyzed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System and the Language Modeling and Literacy Focus (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2004). The findings suggested that the quality of the language and literacy teaching was low. The teachers were not using more

sophisticated strategies, such as asking open-ended questions, repeating and extending children's talk, and modeling advanced language vocabulary (Justice et al., 2008). Teachers were able to adhere to the lesson plans, however, they lacked the ability to provide the high-quality language instruction that is very difficult to script and more difficult to implement (Justice et al., 2008).

Given this evidence, the focus of this professional development was primarily on when and how teachers should intervene with children during play. It focused on when to engage in talk, how to ask cognitively challenging questions, provide meaningful and extended conversations, and provide word strategies for vocabulary enhancement. In addition to the teacher-child interactions setting up a literacy rich environment contributes to the teachers' ability to provide these other strategies.

Creating a language rich environment. The physical environment of the classroom that includes literacy-enriched opportunities has a significant effect on the amount of literacy activities children engage in (Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Noble & Foster, 1993; Vukelich, 1990). This literacy-rich environment needs to include enough props and materials to be able to combine roles and themes, and create pretend scenarios to solve problems and negotiate in order to provide children with the best opportunities to use language and literacy (Bedrova & Leong, 2003). It is the teacher's responsibility to set up the environment not by just adding words or labels, but adding meaningful print so children can communicate and learn new information and concepts (Heroman & Jones, 2010). Teachers need to also organize the classroom to promote conversations as well as incorporate print and include literacy materials in all areas of the classroom (Heroman & Jones, 2010). However, given the importance of setting up the appropriate language rich environment, establishing this type of environment for children is often overlooked, and difficult to put into practice (Justice, 2004; Morrow & Rand, 1990).

One of the characteristics of a high quality classroom is one that exhibits the appropriate language-rich environment (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2005; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Since the classroom's physical environment provides the foundation for literacy learning (Morrow, Tracey & Del Nero, 2011), it is critical that teachers provide the appropriate environment and materials that emphasize the importance of speaking, reading, and writing. The research on this topic examines the classroom environment with a focus on the different aspects of the classroom such as the room arrangement. This includes the dramatic play area, environmental print, book and reading areas, and the addition of literacy props and materials to all areas of the classroom (Morrow, 1990; Neumann, Hood, Ford & Neumann, 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Petrakos & Howe, 1996; Vukelich, 1994).

In a study by Neuman & Roskos, (1990), teachers from two preschool classrooms participated in the redesign of their classroom (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Teachers made several changes to the physical layout of their classroom that included more defined centers that were targeted for literacy enrichment, labeling that included a wide variety of print, and the positioning of quieter areas closer together (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). In addition, literacy props that were appropriate, and authentic, were added to every center of the classroom (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Observations were completed after the redesign. These observations provided evidence that there were more interactive, connected, and sustained literacy activities happening during teacher-child interactions (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Providing a space and props focused on literacy that invited exploration, discovery, and stimulated behaviors, children and teachers were more engaged in the activities for longer periods of time providing for more oral language and vocabulary development.

In another study conducted by Morrow (1990) in thirteen classrooms comprised of a total of 170 children between the ages of four and six, an intervention was used to evaluate the effects of the environmental changes of adding reading and writing materials in the dramatic play area. Prior to the intervention there were no specific literacy provisions or activities for the children, only a dramatic play area set up as a kitchen area (Morrow, 1990). Classrooms were distributed with three classrooms in the control group and the rest divided in three groups of experimental classrooms each with a different intervention (Morrow, 1990). These interventions included one group with teacher – guided instruction using added materials such as books, paper and pencils in the dramatic play area (Morrow, 1990). Another group with the same materials, however placed in the play area. The last experimental group had the intervention of the materials placed in the dramatic play area without any teacher guided instruction. Workshops introducing the materials were provided to all participants, separate for each condition (Morrow, 1990). Classroom anecdotal observations were conducted by the research assistants and the student teachers twice a week for three weeks identifying the literacy behaviors (Morrow, 1990). Observations were completed before and after the intervention and a statistical analysis was used to determine the findings (Morrow, 1990). The findings suggested that children were more likely to participate in literacy behaviors when materials were evident in the environment and introduced by the teachers to guide them in their use of the materials (Morrow, 1990). For example, during the observation of the thematic play setting of a veterinarian's office, the children were observed reading to their stuffed animals while waiting to see the doctor, while others were having conversations with their pets as well as with the doctors and nurses at the office.

In a more recent study by Guo, Sawyer, Justice, and Kaderavek, (2013), fifty-four preschool teachers in inclusive classrooms participated in a study to examine the quality of the literacy environment. The data was collected in the fall of the school year and included questionnaires and a two-hour observation that was video-taped (Guo et al., 2013). Two instruments were used to assess the literacy environment including *The Classroom Literacy Observation Protocol* (CLOP; Children's Learning Research Collaborative, 2008) and the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The structured literacy environment included the books, print, and writing materials in the classrooms. The findings from this study suggested that these materials were generally found to be of low to moderate quality (Guo et al., 2013).

Several studies that discuss a language-rich environment as a characteristic of a high quality classroom focus on environmental print (McGee, Lomax & Head, 1988; Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Vukelich, 1994; Vukelich et al., 2008). Environmental print is defined by Adams, (1990), Kassow, (2006) and Vukelich et al., (2008) as the print that children are exposed to in particular contexts within real life functions, such as logos and signs. In a study by Vukelich, (1994), fifty-six kindergarten children in three classrooms participated in an intervention where five play settings were introduced (Vukelich, 1994). These play settings included a post office, restaurant, a shoe store, a veterinary hospital and a camp site (Vukelich, 1994). The researcher and assistant participated in the play, encouraged the use of the new words in play, as well as observed their play. One of the classrooms added environmental print that the children would be exposed to outside of the classroom play setting (Vukelich, 1994). The other classroom was exposed to the environmental print but the teachers only entered the play to handle behavior issues. Three measures were used to identify the children's literacy knowledge. These measures

include Clay's (1979) *Concepts About Print* (CAP), and two environmental print reading tasks (in-context and out of context) (Vukelich, 1994). Findings suggested that the children that played with the teachers in the play setting learned to read more environmental print than the other children (Vukelich, 1994).

Taken together these studies provide evidence that having literacy materials and environmental print in the classroom is important to children's literacy development (Morrow & Rand, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Vukelich, 1994). However, the teacher-child interaction is also important and is enhanced in literacy-enriched environments where teachers have meaningful conversations with children using cognitively challenging questions and word strategies to increase vocabulary (Connor et al., 2006; Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Justice et al., 2008; Smith & Dickinson, 1994).

Shared book reading. Shared book reading is an interactive reading experience that takes place when children are guided and supported by the teacher when reading a book as a whole class. This strategy helps build vocabulary knowledge by drawing children's attention to particular words, helping them define words by using pictures in the book, and discussing connections that children might make to the new words. Teachers then ask children to make predictions, provide explanations or reasons why things happen in a story. These inferential questions help improve children's comprehension skills (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Prior research demonstrates that reading aloud to children, asking questions, and engaging in discussions about what is being read, are important to children's academic success because they enhance children's comprehension skills, as well as encourage children to understand the text structure of what is being read (Morrow, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982).

Several studies have examined shared book reading and the teachers' specific use of more cognitively challenging questions as a strategy to promote the oral language development of children (Hansen, 2004, Zucker, Justice, Piasta & Kaderavek, 2010). One study (Zucker, et al., 2010) included twenty-five preschool teachers. These teachers videotaped their behaviors and those of the children during their shared reading sessions that included only expository texts for thirty weeks. Children's vocabulary skills were measured in the fall and spring using a variety of observational and direct measures including the expressive vocabulary subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool – Second Edition (CELF Preschool-2:EV; Wiig, Secord & Semel, 2004 and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Form III (PPVT – III, Dunn & Dunn, 1997) (Zucker, et al., 2010). The findings of the study suggested that the expository texts influenced the teacher-child conversations while reading due to the inferential questions embedded in these texts pushing children to use more oral language and new words (Zucker, et al., 2010). Another finding suggested that the more teachers used inferential questions, the more children responded with the cognitively challenging tasks of inferring and analyzing (Zucker et al., 2010). These types of questions help children remember, reason, problem solve, and hypothesize (Massey et al., 2008).

Another smaller qualitative study of just one teacher by Hansen (2004), focused on reading a collection of fiction books including picture and chapter books for a period of 200 hours. The teacher read the books and allowed for an extended period of time for whole class conversations to take place. The researcher videotaped these shared book readings sessions. All observations were transcribed and the teacher added his own personal notes and reflections. The study suggested that making the time for book discussions and engaging with peers in the process helps children focus on the content of the book. Children are able to respond to

questions which builds their expressive oral language. Being able to respond to inferential

questions and have discussions together as a group helps children think about the story more than

just what they see in the pictures (Hansen, 2004).

These studies used either non-fiction or fiction books for their shared book reading

activities, however, both showed a positive impact on the amount and type of inferential

questions used by the teacher resulting in a higher level of meaningful discussions during the

shared book reading activities (Hansen, 2004; Zucker et al., 2010). During, and after the book

reading the questions that teachers used such as those that required inference, prediction,

reasoning or explanation resulted in an increase in the oral language skills of young children.

Both studies, however, had limitations including the use of only one genre (fiction or

non-fiction) (Zucker et al., 2010) since these different types of books elicit different types of

responses. In order to really focus on increasing meaningful conversations with children it

would seem that teachers need to use a variety of non-fiction and fiction during shared book

reading time. They also need to extend these conversation skills into the other areas of the

classrooms, such as in dramatic play, block area, etc. during all components of the daily schedule

(Hansen, 2014).

Drawing from the results of these studies my professional development included

strategies such as having meaningful and extended conversations with children, asking

cognitively challenging questions and using sophisticated vocabulary; those strategies that have

shown evidence that they produce positive outcomes for children's oral language and vocabulary

development during playtime. It also included how teachers can establish a literacy enrichment

environment, not just with the use of labels, but words incorporated into experiences that are

meaningful to children. Since this study focuses on providing these skills during playtime, the

next area of literature I examine is on play and the teachers' role in play.

Research on Play

While play is considered a child's activity, people of all ages play. However, play is

viewed differently based on the age of the player. Play has multiple perspectives and is

extremely complex (Johnson, 2015). Hendricks (2008) in an article written for the *American

Journal of Play* provides an understanding of play in the following statement:

> It is probably fair to say that most theories of human play associate play with the freedom
> of human beings to express themselves openly and to render creatively the conditions of
> their lives. It is a respite from the necessities of life, a stretch in time when the normal
> affairs of the world are suspended. People are free to conjure new possibilities of being
> and, even more importantly, to test the implications of those possibilities in protected
> forms of behavior. To play is to create and then to inhabit a distinctive world of one's
> own making.

Piaget (1962) defined play as a way that children create knowledge by interacting with the

objects and activities in their environment by trying things out and creating their own

understandings. When young children play they discover and explore the world around them.

Play builds a child's intellect, helps develop social skills, problem solving skills, and

interpersonal skills.

The idea or concept of play has been researched in many different ways and in many

contexts over the past decades. Much of the research on play and young children focuses on the

benefits or the impacts play has on children's learning and development (Brown, 2009; Copple

& Bredekamp, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007; Miller & Almon, 2009; Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef

2004).

The benefits play provides children during the early years of development are numerous.

These benefits include positive impacts on a child's social and emotional, physical, cognitive,

and language and literacy development (Ginsbury, 2007; Fromberg, 2002; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef, 2004). Play supports children's learning not only in the developmental domains of reading, mathematics, and science, it also provides opportunities to develop language, reasoning and social skills (National Research Council, 2001). Research demonstrates that students who play in school score better in cognitive flexibility, self-control and working memory (Galinsky, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2008; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004). These are all attributes of "executive function," which is consistently linked to academic achievement (Barnett et al., 2008). These mental abilities include sustained attention, memory, logic, language and literacy skills, imagination, creativity, understanding of emotions, and the ability to reflect on one's own thinking.

When teachers provide children with opportunities to be involved in child-directed activities children have opportunities to continually try things out, make decisions, discover, and explore (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). For children it is more about the process of learning, rather than the product or end result of the activity. When children play they begin to use abstract thinking skills, explore math concepts, and solve problems (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). When we allow children to play with everyday objects such as what they might see at home or in the community through their exploration of these objects they become problem solvers and creative thinkers (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Children are curious and play allows children to learn about different possibilities which is crucial to how children learn (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

In addition to the intellectual benefits, play also helps children develop social and emotional skills by having opportunities to cooperate with others and engage in socially appropriate behaviors as they work out solutions with other children (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Play helps children regulate their emotions, understand social cues, express themselves, and learn how to get along with others (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Play is also an emotional equalizer, enabling children to work through difficulties and provides them with defenses against the realities of life (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Social-emotional development is critical to a child's academic pursuits (Elman & Moore, 2003).

Given the amount of learning opportunities that play offers, how teachers use play to extend children's capabilities is important for learning in the early years. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) asserts that not just any play opportunity will provide the academic learning young children need for kindergarten and beyond. In order for young children to learn these skills teachers need to provide opportunities for play to be complex, long lasting, and engaging for children (Gronlund, 2010). When teachers understand their role in children's play and are intentional they can extend and enhance children's learning (Eptstein, 2014).

Teachers' Roles in Children's Play

The research focusing on what teachers do in children's play and how they use play as a pedagogy is a much less investigated body of play research. A handful of studies have tried to conceptualize the teacher's role in children's play and tend to identify general categories of these roles (Enz & Christie, 1993; 1994; Fleer, 2015; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). Other studies focus on how teachers attempt to use play for academic learning (McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley, 2011; McInnes, Howard, Crowley & Miles, 2013: Pyle & Bigelow, 2014; Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

Roles that teachers take. Qualitative studies conducted by Jones & Reynolds (2011) and Fleer (2015) have identified several key roles that teachers take on to support and scaffold

children's learning through play. In both studies the roles teachers have in children's play are varied with some roles more easily accepted and understood than others.

Jones & Reynolds worked in two sites with five teachers and five assistant teachers along with student assistants and parent volunteers (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The teachers in this study acted as teacher researchers, where the teachers that participated in this action research study also collected data. Observations in addition to time for conversations and reflection with teachers in these two schools were completed over a period of several years.

In working with the teachers, Jones and Reynolds identified seven roles that teachers take on in children's play. These consisted of the teacher as a "stage manager, mediator, player, scribe, assessor and communicator and planner, observer and recorder" (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The "stage manager" is the role teachers take when setting up the classroom environment to include props and materials and allow time for children to play. The role of "mediator" is when the teacher works with children to help them solve conflicts, teaching them problem solving skills (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The teacher in the role of "player" sustains play as the teacher participates in the children's play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). As a "scribe", "recorder," and "observer" the teacher is able to identify the children's experiences as they play in order to find ways to support and enhance children's play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). As an "assessor" and "communicator" the teacher identifies what can be done to support children in the learning process (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

The teachers in this study were most familiar with the role of "stage manager" when the teacher sets up the environment for play and the role of the "planner. As the "planner" of children's play Jones and Reynolds (2011) identified how the teacher was more comfortable when planning for teacher-directed activities and less comfortable when planning for

sociodramatic play and language development (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The role of the

"player" was a role that teachers fell into more easily. Jones and Reynolds (2011) identified a

wide range of the teachers involvement with children's play which ranged from supportive and

playful but at other times intrusive (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). In the role of "player" the teacher

may actually inhibit children's learning by interrupting the play or directing it (Jones &

Reynolds, 2011). Encouraging the teachers to plan for children's learning through play was not

easily accepted, therefore, the role of "assessor" and "communicator" become necessary so

teachers are able to see how children learn as they played (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Another qualitative study completed in five Australian classrooms focused on the

interaction and the roles the teachers took when children were playing (Fleer, 2015). In this

study, video observations were completed of nine teachers over a period of three to eight weeks

during free play (Fleer, 2015). The research of Fleer (2015) suggests that the proximity of the

teacher when the children are playing matters as to how the teachers interact with them.

Findings suggested that the teachers spent most of their time outside of children's play (Fleer,

2015). Teachers were rarely observed taking an active role in children's play, however when

this was observed the teachers acted as a resource or coordinator for the children rather than

engaging the children in opportunities to extend or enhance their learning (Fleer, 2015). For

example, the teachers introduced their own educational agenda to meet a science learning

standard when the children were involved in playing pirates. In order to use play as an avenue

for teachers to provide academics, teachers need to have a better understanding of how they can

use play as an avenue for teaching and a better understanding of what the teacher's roles are

when inside children's play (Fleer, 2015; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2014).

The roles identified by Jones & Reynolds (2011) and Fleer (2015) fall into two larger categories. These categories either have the teacher taking an active role in children's play or positions the teacher outside of children's play (Fleer, 2015). The teacher's roles such as observer and stage manager are ones that support the children's play from the outside. In these roles the teacher can provide materials and set up the classroom environment to enhance children's play. When the teachers take on roles inside children's play they have opportunities to interact with children to help extend and expand children's play, however, in these roles teachers took on a more passive role and tended to be less involved in children's play (Fleer, 2015). When outside children's play teachers are not able to identify closely with what the children were doing resulting in missed opportunities or misinterpretation of the children's activities resulting in the interruption of play rather than enhancing it (Fleer, 2015).

Several studies by Kontos (1999) and Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot (2011) completed in the United States support the theoretical approach that teachers take an active role in children's play and "scaffold" children's learning. Forty teachers and assistant teachers from 22 Head Start classrooms participated in the study completed by Kontos (1999). During free play time, teachers were audiotaped for fifteen minutes on two different days and the various roles of the teachers were coded (Kontos, 1999). Drawing on the research of Enz & Christie (1993;1994), Kontos identified that the teachers' roles in play included the role of the "interviewer," the "stage manager," the "play enhancer or playmate," the "safety or behavior monitor," and the "uninvolved" (Enz & Christie, 1993; 1994; Kontos, 1999).

The most frequently coded teacher role was that of the "stage manager," which was taken on by teachers forty seven percent of the time during free play (Kontos, 1999). Enz & Christie (1993; 1994) define this teacher role as one that helps children get ready for play by providing

the materials and the support children need in using the materials. The other teacher role that was frequently coded was that of the "play enhancer or playmate," which was employed 38% of the time by teachers (Kontos, 1999). Enz & Christie (1993; 1994) define this role as when the teacher enters the children's play and participates in their conversations. Both these roles positioned the teacher inside the children's play. The other roles were adopted by the teachers less than ten percent of the time (Kontos, 1999).

In another mixed methods study by Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot (2011), eight early childhood professionals that included teachers, assistant teachers, in addition to student assistants from two full day preschool classrooms were video recorded during four and five, 30-minute sessions. This research focused on the teacher's interaction with the children and the amount of support the children needed during play (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). The teachers were also interviewed and secondary sources of information such as the center philosophy and mission statement were gathered (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). The roles teachers have inside play observed in this study at times inhibited children's play (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). For example when a teacher demanded or prompted a child to behave in a certain way, the teacher was not responding to the needs of the children's play (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). The percentage of this type of interaction occurring ranged from thirty seven to sixty five percent of the time indicating that the teachers' interactions did not meet the children's play needs (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot (2011) found that in order for teachers to support children's play, the teacher first needs to observe the children playing (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). This role of the "observer" is necessary for teachers to identify the support needed to advance the child's play (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011).

Several studies by Lobman (2003; 2006) look specifically at the teacher's role in and outside of the play. Using the sociocultural lens of improvisation as a "player," Lobman (2003) focused on four teachers' interactions with the children during play. Observations were conducted in two classrooms for four hours a week over a 16-week period of time using field notes and video recordings (Lobman, 2003). Two classroom scenes were analyzed in which Lobman shows how if teachers use the improvisational strategy of accepting children's offers that they are able to enhance and deepen children's play experience (Lobman, 2003). For example, in one scene when a child was not following directions, instead of the teacher imposing the rules directly she accepted the offer of the child and continued the exchange by giving and receiving offers (Lobman, 2003). Findings suggest that the improvised activity of accepting children's offers gave way to rich and complex play and more conversations (Lobman, 2003).

In a later study by Lobman (2006) where once again improvisation was the focus of the analysis, two teachers were observed for 2 hours a week over 16 weeks and were also interviewed (Lobman, 2006). The data were analyzed focusing on the teacher-child interactions (Lobman, 2006). Eighty-one interactions were identified and the responsiveness of the interactions were examined using the lens of improvisation. Findings suggested that when teachers were responsive and improvisation strategies such as the giving and accepting of offers, and using "yes and" allowed activities to emerge without the teacher controlling what was going to happen (Lobman, 2006). Lobman argues that improvisation can be used to look at what is happening in teacher's practice with a better understanding of "leading", "redirecting", and "listening" (Lobman, 2007).

Taken together these studies by Lobman (2003; 2006) shed light on how we might be able to help teachers understand their role when participating in children's play. Giving teachers

concrete tools to make changes in their teaching practices, such as the use of improvisation techniques, is one way of helping teachers to have a better understanding of their role in children's play.

Teaching through play for academic learning. Since the effects of play on children's learning are not easily measured, play has not always been viewed as an opportunity to teach children in the United States. However, in other countries, play has been an important part of early childhood learning and an important pedagogy in classroom practices (Ashiabi, 2007). Several international studies that I reviewed consider play as the pedagogical approach needed for teachers to support children's academic learning. Two qualitative studies completed in Canada for example explored the use of play-based learning in public kindergarten classrooms (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). The smaller study by Pyle & Bigelow (2015) examined three different kindergarten classrooms, whereas the larger study by Pyle & Danniels (2017) examined fifteen kindergarten classrooms in three school districts in Canada.

The data for the smaller qualitative study by Pyle & Bigelow (2015) was collected over four months and consisted of classroom observations and interviews of both teachers and students (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). The classroom observation data consisted of between fifty-six and seventy hours of recordings along with field notes and photographs of both teacher-directed and play-based learning activities (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). The three teachers in the Pyle & Bigelow (2015) study used play for children's learning, however, each one of them used a different approach to play (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

Two of the teachers struggled with using play to teach academic skills in order to meet the standards, however, one of these teachers believed that children learned social and emotional skills through play and offered forty-five to sixty minutes of play each day (Pyle & Bigelow,

2015). One teacher in the study viewed play as an opportunity for academic learning (Pyle &

Bigelow, 2015). This classroom had play periods of sixty to ninety minutes each day where the

play complemented the teacher-directed instruction, by allowing children to process, ask

questions, and share their knowledge about what was taught. However, the teacher continued to

question how to match the children's interests to the required academic standards that needed to

be met (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

The play-based learning approaches in the other two classrooms consisted of "play as

peripheral to learning" and "play as a vehicle for social and emotional development" as opposed

to having "play as a vehicle for academic learning" (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). When play was

considered peripheral to learning the overall focus was on the teaching of academic skills that the

administration required her to teach (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). In the classroom when play was

used a vehicle for social and emotional development play was used to teach social and emotional

skills through child-directed activities for 45-60 minutes every day (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). The

academic skills were taught during the teacher-directed activities when children were expected to

listen to the teacher (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

In the larger, more recent, qualitative study of Pyle & Danniels (2017) data was collected

over a three-year period of time in two phases (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In phase one, between

fifty-six and seventy hours of observations were completed and in phase two, a minimum of ten

hours of observations were completed (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Data was collected during both

phases through field notes, photographs, and semi-structured interviews with the teachers (Pyle

& Danniels, 2017). Six of the teachers viewed play as something separate from academic

learning, and nine of the fifteen teachers identified play as a way to support the learning of

academic content (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). These nine teachers were observed participating in

collaborative play, which led to "playful learning" to teach academic standards. however only five of these teachers were observed using play to teach academic skills (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). These five teachers were observed using inquiry play where the activity was child initiated and the teachers extended the play to include the academic standards (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). This research supports the need for training that provides teachers with a broader understanding of play-based learning and practical ways to implement this change in pedagogical focus (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Several studies by McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley (2011) and McInnes, Howard, Crowley & Miles (2013) used the same sample and data, however, one analyzed the data focused on the teachers and the other on the children in two English early years classrooms. These qualitative studies by McInnes et al., (2011; 2013) observed two teachers, one assistant teacher and four children in two classrooms during one morning and one afternoon session. Semi-structured interviews were also completed (McInnes et al., 2011; 2013). The teachers from this study valued a play-based approach to learning, however, none of the teachers had received any training regarding the theory of play (McInnes et al., 2011). The teachers in one classroom not only valued play-based learning, they also implemented play in their practice by adding activities and participated in the children's play whereas this was not the case in the other classroom (McInnes et al.,2011). When the adult is considered part of the play the child is in control, however, when the adult directs the play there are more directives and less meaningful learning happening.

By looking at how the teachers in these studies provided academic teaching through play provides concrete examples of how to use play as an avenue for teaching. Since my study focuses on playtime and the teaching of oral language and vocabulary skills, providing teachers

with the knowledge and concrete practices they could use during playtime with the children might contribute to their use of play as an avenue for literacy development.

Teaching of Oral Language and Vocabulary during Playtime

Few studies of oral language and vocabulary focus on what the teachers do during playtime. However there is research (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; de Rivera, Girolametto, Greenberg, & Weitzman, 2005; Dickinson, Darrow, & Tinabu, 2008; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Kontos, 1999; Massey et al., 2008; Meacham, Vukelich, Han, & Buell 2014; Tompkins, Zucker, Justice, & Binici, 2013) on teaching oral language and vocabulary during playtime, while children are playing in the specific content areas of the classroom; for example, blocks, dramatic play, manipulative, water/sand, etc. Several quantitative and mixed methods studies (Connor et al., 2006; de Rivera et al., 2005; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002: Kontos, 1999; Massey et al., 2008) examined what the teachers were doing in the various centers of the classroom during playtime. These studies focused on the strategies teachers used to enhance the preschoolers' language and literacy development, which included the use of cognitively challenging questions, utterance extension, and the use of sophisticated vocabulary (Connor et al., 2006; de Rivera et al., 2005; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002: Kontos, 1999; Massey et al., 2008).

For example, in an early mixed-methods study by Kontos (1999), a few variables were identified that impacted teacher-child interaction in a preschool classroom, including the teacher talk and involvement with children during free play. Twenty Head Start teachers and their assistant teachers participated in this study (Kontos, 1999). Teachers were instructed to go about their regular routine and were audiotaped on two different days during free playtime for an average time for all teachers of 29.5 minutes and all assistant teachers of 27.45 minutes (Kontos,

1999). The audio recordings were transcribed and coded according to the verbalizations and activity setting (Kontos, 1999). Findings suggested that teachers' roles and use of language varied depending on the classroom context they were in (Kontos, 1999). Teachers spent more time with children in the building and manipulative areas of the classrooms and used more encouraging and supportive language, but spent less time in fantasy play or dramatic play areas (Kontos, 1999). Teachers were highly involved with the children, however the excerpts from the audio recordings showed that the conversations lacked the more cognitively challenging questions, and teachers did not engage in many extended conversations with children (Kontos, 1999).

In a smaller quantitative study Massey et al. (2008) focused on teachers' questions that engaged the children in conceptually challenging conversations during various times of the day including playtime. Fourteen teachers and their assistant teachers along with 192 children participated in the study (Massey et al., 2008). Open-ended questions require more than a yes and no response and these kinds of questions encourage children to extend their language and improve their active participation in the conversations. In the fall 90-120 minute observations were conducted in each of the fourteen classrooms (Massey et al., 2008). These observations were completed by trained researchers, including faculty or graduate students, in a range of classroom activities primarily to capture the language of the teacher and the assistant (Massey et al., 2008). Observations were transcribed, coded and a descriptive analysis of the transcripts was completed (Massey et al., 2008). Findings from this study provided evidence that questions made up a substantial portion of the teachers' utterances; however, the more cognitively challenging questions which are the types of questions that provide the most learning opportunities, amounted to only one tenth of these utterances and the more cognitively

challenging questions were more evident depending on the classroom contexts (Massey et al.,

2008).

Summary

Taken together, this body of research identifies the need to clearly define play-based

learning and provide training for teachers to give them an understanding of how to use play as an

avenue to teach (Fleer, 2015; Kontos,1999; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; McInnes et al., 2011; 2103;

Massey et al., 2008;; Lobman, 2003; 2006; Pyle & Danniels, 2015; 2017; Trawick-Smith &

Dziurgot, 2011). The roles that teachers take on can support play inside and outside children's

play. Both kinds of roles are important for teachers to understand in order for them to participate

in these roles to effectively use play as an avenue for teaching.

In order to better understand the implications of the professional development this next

section will focus on the research on literacy, and the impact certain professional development

models have had for teachers.

Research on Literacy Professional Development

Research on professional development in early childhood education is a growing field of

inquiry. These studies employ a range of designs and include small-scale, qualitative studies,

mixed methods studies of particular interventions or larger policy capturing studies. Many of the

models that have been tried are often literacy focused however a few have focused on oral

language and vocabulary alone. Looking across the research base the interventions that have

been effective are those that are embedded within teachers' practices (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre,

& Pianta, 2008; Neumann & Cunningham, 2009), and give teachers ongoing opportunities to

practice and reflect upon their new learning (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008).

Some of these studies of professional development interventions use various curricula programs or supplements that are intended to increase the amount of language and literacy instruction during a specific classroom context, while others focus on language practices during children's play. These studies range from grant funded programs such as Early Reading First (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) that support teachers' professional development to enhance children's language and literacy development (Meacham et al., 2014) to the use of new curriculum such as Opening the World of Learning (Schickendanz & Dickinson, 2005) that focuses on all domains of early learning with a unit specific to conversations with children (Dickinson et al., 2008).

Use of Literacy Curricula with Professional Development Interventions

Most studies that look at the teaching of oral language and vocabulary in preschool examine the implementation of some type of intervention to improve how teachers support children's language development (Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster & Forston, 2015; Cabell, Justice, Piasta, Curenton, Wiggins, Turnball &Petscher, 2011; Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Neuman, Newman & Dwyer, 2011). As researchers are interested in seeing if the intervention has an impact on teaching and learning, these studies typically employ quasi-experimental or experimental designs. Typically, these studies measure oral language by the number of words used and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-II (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997).

One example of this type of kind of programmatic intervention is a series of studies based on a program "Learning Language and Loving It" (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002). This program consists of practical strategies including those that are child-oriented, interaction promoting, and language-modeling that teachers can use to promote the language development of children. The program "Learning Language and Loving It" by Weitzman & Greenberg (2002)

has been the focus of several year- long intervention studies (Cabell et al., 2011; Cabell et al., 2015).

In the first study, Cabell et al. (2011) used a control trial that randomly assigned forty-nine preschool teachers from various Head Start or state-funded preschool programs in one mid-Atlantic state to either a professional development group or control group. Twenty-five teachers received the professional development and twenty-four did not. The seventeen-hour workshop series provided responsive strategies to help teachers engage three-year old children in conversations, and to be able to recognize opportunities for stimulating children's language development (Cabell et al., 2011). In addition, teachers received six individual coaching sessions by trained research assistants through e-mail that included written feedback on the videotaped recordings of the teachers' responsive conversations with the children either during a small group activity or storybook reading (Cabell et al., 2011). The data collected to examine teacher change included 20-minute self-recorded videos of the teachers' use of conversationally responsive strategies with children. Other data included pre and post measures of children's language and literacy skills as an outcome measure of teacher professional development. These measures included two subsets of Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool-2 (CELF-P: 2; Wiig, Secord & Semel, 2004), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-II (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997), the Expressive Vocabulary subtest of the CELF Preschool-2 (Wiig et al., 2004) and the Preschool Print and Word Awareness test (Justice, Bowles & Skibbe, 2006). The findings suggested that teachers' use of communication-facilitating strategies provided children the opportunity to practice their language skills within the context of everyday conversations (Cabell et al., 2011). Findings also showed that teachers did not use language modeling

strategies frequently, and that understanding the link between social skills and language skills would be important to focus on for future research (Cabell et al., 2011).

In the second study Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster, Forston (2015) extended their prior work by examining how the teacher-child conversations contributed to children's vocabulary growth over time when the teachers also used the program "Learning Language and Loving It" (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002). Twenty-two teachers were randomly assigned to the intervention group, while another twenty-two teachers were in the control group. The intervention included two one-day workshops on the program "Language Learning and Loving It" (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002) held in the fall and winter of the school year, as well as readings that were part of the "Language Learning and Loving It" (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002) manual distributed separately throughout the year.

Data was collected on teacher-child interactions during small-group time by the teacher videotaping him/herself during a pre-specified small group play dough activity (Cabell et al., 2015). A trained research assistant shared written feedback with each teacher which included what the teacher did well, reflection considerations, and improvement strategies (Cabell et al., 2015). Pre- and post-assessment measures of children's vocabulary skills were collected using measures that included the Expressive Vocabulary subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool-2 (CELF-P; 2; Wiig et al., 2004) and the Peabody Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997) (Cabell et al., 2015). Using a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) the researchers focused on the frequency of strategies used, and the pattern of the strategies used (Cabell et al., 2015). Analysis of this data suggested that when the teachers had a greater amount of engagement with children using higher-level conversational strategies the children experienced greater vocabulary gains (Cabell et al., 2015).

Looking across both these studies findings based on the battery of child assessments completed over two academic years suggest a positive impact of the professional development intervention on the volume and quality of the teacher-child conversations as measured by child outcomes (Cabell et al., 2015; Cabell et al., 2011). An important focus of the professional development of "Language Learning and Loving It" (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002) intervention was teaching teachers to follow the children's lead during conversations (Cabell et al., 2015; Cabell et al., 2011). Engaging children in conversations on the topics that they were interested in provided for increased multi-turn conversations (Cabell et al., 2015; Cabell et al., 2011) between teachers and children. Overall the findings of this study suggest that the professional development increased teacher-child engagement and the facilitation of higher-level conversations (Cabell et al., 2015). However, in a final analysis using both the treatment and control groups of teachers from both studies, researchers found that many teachers, even those who participated in the professional development, had difficulty engaging children in sustained conversations on particular topics (Cabell et al., 2015; Cabell, et al., 2011).

Another group of studies (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Neuman, Newman & Dwyer, 2011) looked at the supplemental intervention "World of Words" (Neuman, Dwyer, Koh & Wright, 2007) and whether a professional development model associated with the program contributed to teachers' use of strategies to support the vocabulary development of low-income preschoolers. For example, a small design experiment by Neuman & Dwyer (2011) was completed in two phases. The first phase was designed to examine the words that children were most likely to learn and retain (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). The second phase was designed to implement the changes identified from phase one to "World of Words" (Neuman et al., 2007) to improve upon the vocabulary instruction. Twelve teachers were either assigned to a treatment or control group

(Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). In the treatment group, teachers received support with the implementation of the vocabulary supplement "World of Words" (Neuman et al., 2007) through monthly discussion group sessions (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). In addition to their core program, teachers in the treatment group were asked to include activities associated with the "World of Words" supplement for twelve to fifteen minutes each day. Each twelve to fifteen minute session consisted of a rhyme, song, and a wordplay video clip (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). The teachers reflected on their own notes from their observations of the classroom activities and video examples.

The data to support these findings were based on pretests and posttests of children using a "World of Words" expressive vocabulary test and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT; Dunn & Dunn, 1997) to examine the receptive vocabulary of the children. Teacher data was collected using The Early Language and Literacy Observation (Smith & Dickinson, 2002) to identify the literacy supports such as paper, books, writing implements, etc. in the classroom environments. The research team that consisted of four graduate research assistants and a project director used teachers' lesson plans as a guide to gather the details of the activities to further support and question what the teachers were doing (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). They observed and recorded the classroom activities throughout the experiment. Teachers also created detailed notes and diaries associated with the activities as well as used video cameras to document the activities (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011).

The findings from the teachers and researchers during the phase one intervention indicated that children were able to learn words and identify the word concepts and properties when they used categories or groupings of the relationships of where words might belong, which leads to greater gains in comprehension abilities (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). For example, when

children are shown a picture of a spider, children know that it is not an insect because it does not

have six legs, since they were able to make a connection between the properties of a spider and

an insect (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). In addition, the teachers' feedback resulted in further

refinement of the strategies used in children's categorization of words (Neuman & Dwyer,

2011). Teachers used a more intensive instructional activity that included a rhyme, song or

wordplay video clip to engage children with playing with language every day (Neuman &

Dwyer, 2011). This was followed by a content video and then the teachers engaged the students

in what, why or where questions (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). An informational book and another

book on the same topic would then be read (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). These activities used for

vocabulary acquisition resulted in the acceleration of children's learning of words (Neuman &

Dwyer, 2011). Findings from this phase also provided evidence that immediately after the

instruction children were able to make greater gains learning hard words, but that these words

were lost more frequently over time than the easy words (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011).

Phase one findings suggested that children needed to hear, say and practice words more

frequently, and in a variety of contexts. There was also a need to further identify in the

beginning of the lesson the properties that were related to each of the topics such as emotions,

healthy foods, pets, insects, and wild animals (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). For example, the topic

of insects would need to include details such as they have six legs, antennae to smell and feel

things, and mostly live outdoors. To implement these changes to the "World of Words"

(Neuman & et al., 2007) program supplemental activities such as a quick call-and- response

question for each word were included to review the hard words associated with a topic (Neuman

& Dwyer, 2011). The second phase also included more repetition and greater use of each of the

words. Teachers were also given additional steps to include in their lesson plans that would help

them better understand the activities they implemented (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). To

incorporate these changes, the teachers participated in a workshop that showed the details of the

revisions made to the "World of Words" (Newman et al., 2007) program (Neuman & Dwyer,

2011). The results showed that when teachers used more intensive instruction there were

positive outcomes that supported children's reasoning and knowledge of the concepts and words

taught (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). Findings also suggested that when teachers provided children

with more explicit details regarding the properties of the new words, making inferences and

generalizations about the words, children were able to scaffold the learning of new words,

building greater vocabulary growth (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). As measured by the "World of

Words" expressive language assessment (Neuman et al., 2007), the children in the treatment

group showed higher language assessment scores. The children in the treatment group as

measured by the knowledge section of the "World or Words" program (Newman et al., 2007)

were able to retain the new vocabulary, both easy and hard words, for longer periods of time.

Another smaller mixed method intervention study by Han, Roskos, Christie, Mandzuk &

Vukelich (2005) examined two different curriculum models, "Doors to Discovery" (Bothell,

2002), a comprehensive literacy curriculum focused on oral language, phonological awareness,

print awareness, alphabet knowledge, and comprehension, and the "Creative Curriculum"

(Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2000), a developmentally appropriate curriculum that employs play

centers for learning (Han et al., 2005). For a period of three-and-a-half months, three teachers

used the "Doors to Discovery" (Bothell, 2002) language and literacy program while the control

group consisted of two teachers that used "Creative Curriculum" (Dodge, Colker & Herman,

2000). The intervention group participated in a training session to learn the "Doors to

Discovery" (Bethell, 2002) early literacy program and a research assistant, helped in the

classroom with suggestions and guidance and videotaped the activities, in both the treatment and intervention groups weekly by research assistants for ten to fifteen minutes of activities for a total of 150 minutes of instruction time, and used video journals to capture as many details as possible (Han et al., 2005). The qualitative analysis showed that the "Doors to Discovery" (Bethell, 2002) teachers used more sophisticated strategies to introduce words, which gave more context to each word so the children could better understand the meaning of the new words. Findings suggested that there were no significant differences in teacher talk between the two curriculums, however the children in "Doors to Discovery" (Bethell, 2002) classrooms used more talk than the children in the "Creative Curriculum" (Dodge et al., 2000). Since the teachers chose the activities to use, these differences may have been caused by the different teacher discourse used in the activities making it difficult to compare the curricula. The researchers determined that a further, more critical study of both of these curricula would be beneficial to determine the teachers' use of vocabulary instruction.

Taken together this group of studies of professional development associated with specific literacy curriculum interventions would suggest that teachers can be taught strategies focused on oral language, and vocabulary skills. These studies suggest that if teachers participate in professional development opportunities that help them learn strategies to improve teacher-child conversations, children's oral language and vocabulary will improve. The professional development models used in these studies included a variety of approaches that involved learning instructional strategies, participating in learning communities, and providing offsite coaching models and on-site support. These interventions lasted anywhere from between three and a half months to over a year.

Professional Development Focused on Playtime and Literacy

In this section I continue to discuss professional development interventions, however these interventions are focused less on whole group or teacher directed activities. Instead these studies focus on the time when children have the opportunity to play, explore and discover the classroom centers, such as blocks, art, dramatic play, manipulative, and science areas, etc. This group of mixed methods professional development initiatives use a variety of interventions related to specific language practices, such as increased multi turn taking conversations, and how to follow the children's lead (Meacham, Vukelich, Han & Buell, 2014; Tompkins, Zucker, Justice & Binici, 2013). Several are funded by the United States Department of Education, "Early Reading First", (2009) (Hindman & Wasik, 2008; 2012; Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2006; Wasik & Hindman, 2011) where the emphasis is on a research-based language and early reading practices for children at risk.

One of these studies conducted by Dickinson et al., (2008) investigated a new curriculum, "Opening the World of Learning (OWL)" (Schickendanz & Dickinson, 2005) which focused on supporting teachers when reading and discussing books, and during the conversations that were taking place while children were engaged in centers. This was a small mixed methods study of four teachers, all of who had a Child Development Associate (CDA) degree and were teaching in Head Start classrooms (Dickinson et al., 2008). Teachers were instructed to play with children in the dramatic play and block centers daily (Dickinson et al., 2008). An educational specialist recorded ten minutes of teacher child interaction in the block center, and five to six minutes in dramatic play for four days during a two week period. Teacher discourse, including their rate of speech and the amount of talk was one of the factors that this analysis indicated might have been associated with the variability in the children's language learning (Dickinson et al., 2008). Modeling of more sophisticated language was almost never observed

(Dickinson et al., 2008). The findings indicated that even when using a curriculum such as

OWL, teachers were not using the strategies that increased children's language and literacy skills

in part because teacher-child conversations were often interrupted so teachers could manage or

redirect other children's behavior (Dickinson et al., 2008). It was evident throughout this

research that there was substantial room for improvement in the teachers' support of the

children's language and learning (Dickinson et al., 2008).

Several studies used professional interventions in Head Start programs to help teachers

improve their oral language and vocabulary instruction (Hindman & Wasik, 2008; 2012; Wasik,

Bond & Hindman, 2006; Wasik & Hindman, 2011). Each of the studies used a different

intervention, that included an Early Reading First professional development (Hindman & Wasik,

2008), a specific training model based on the research of Whitehurst, Arnold et al.,(1994) and

Wasik & Bond (2001), and the Exceptional Coaching for Early Language and Literacy

(ExCELL) a coaching model intervention (Hindman & Wasik, 2011; 2012).

In the study by Wasik et al., (2006) two Head Start centers and a total of sixteen teachers

participated in a quasi-experiment in which one center with ten teachers was assigned to the

intervention while the other center was the control with six teachers. The treatment consisted of

training teachers on oral language strategies that could be used as an extension of book reading.

The intervention teachers were provided twenty-two prop boxes that consisted of lesson plans to

guide the implementation of the activities, along with books and related concrete objects that

were related to the targeted words that children were expected to learn (Wasik et al., 2006). The

intervention took place for a period of nine months and consisted of an oral language and book

reading training once a month for two hours (Wasik et al., 2006). The strategies taught consisted

of using informational talk and new vocabulary words with children, and asking questions of

children so there would be more language (Wasik et al., 2006). Teachers were given the opportunity to practice the strategies learned for two weeks, teachers were then observed and given feedback, and the training sessions continued using a coaching model with teachers receiving two hours of direct coaching each month (Wasik et al., 2006). Data was collected in the fall and in the spring through direct observations of the questions and teacher talk that was used in the classroom. Findings from this research suggests that teachers can be trained to implement strategies necessary for children's language and literacy development and that children's vocabulary can have significant increases when provided the appropriate opportunities to learn (Wasik et al., 2006). It is equally necessary to share the importance of extending these strategies during the other classroom activities and within the classroom environment (Wasik et al., 2006).

A larger quantitative study of thirty-nine teachers by Tompkins et al., (2013) focused on inferential talk during small group play-based activities, which included conversations that involved predicting, reasoning, planning, and hypothesizing. Teachers were randomly assigned to either implementing business as usual, or participating in a professional development that consisted of language practices such as increased multi turn conversations and following the children's lead. Data was collected on the teachers' interactions with children during twenty-minute video-taped sessions of small group (four to six children) play time and collected midway through the year (Tompkins et al., 2013). In addition, teachers recorded their classroom instruction every two weeks for twenty minutes over a thirty-week period and were asked to submit fifteen videos during the academic year (Tompkins et al., 2013). The data was analyzed using sequential analytic methods looking at the types of questions teachers used (Tompkins et al., 2013). Data was also collected on the children's utterances and coded for the type of

inferential responses. No significant differences were found in the two groups of teachers and their use of inferential talk, however the number of inferential questions were significantly related to the teachers' level of education, but not significantly related to their years of teaching experience (Tompkins et al., 2013). The professional development intervention had no influence on the teachers' use of inferential questions (Tompkins et al., 2013). Findings suggested that inferential questions were used more frequently in areas where children were using play-dough and pretend play. These types of questions may have been more relevant in that context of using play-dough because teachers were not as focused on controlling the activity as they might have been in the pretend play area of the classroom, since there was no right or wrong way to use the play-dough materials, leading to richer and deeper discussions (Tompkins et al., 2008). Since the use of inferential questions has been found to promote preschoolers' language skills during play settings and play-based activities (Tompkins et al., 2008) it was important to include the use of inferential questions in specific classroom contexts as a strategy in my professional development at CPNS.

In another smaller quantitative study of eleven teachers, also from Head Start programs, questioning was observed within the classroom context of socio-dramatic play during two play settings, a doctor's office and a post office (Meacham et al., 2014). This particular professional development lasted for several years consisting of group sessions and coaching on the language use between the teacher and children within a variety of classroom settings with the focus on the dramatic play area (Meacham et al., 2014). The data for this study was collected during the third year of this program which allowed time for the teachers to be more familiar with the implementation of an Early Reading First project (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). During the data collection phase, the dramatic play area, the focus of this particular study was changed

with each theme and consisted of a doctor's office, and post office for the data collection period (Meacham et al., 2014). Video data was collected on the teachers' participation in the dramatic play area for a two week period that ranged from twenty-two minutes, twenty-five seconds in one class to fifty minutes and forty-three seconds in another (Meacham et al., 2014). The teachers' question types were coded and analyzed to determine how the preschool teachers used questions and how children responded during the dramatic play period (Meacham et al., 2014).

Findings suggested children had more opportunities to practice language when teachers used either open-ended or closed-ended questions and just talking with children encouraged language development within the dramatic play area. It was also found that questions could sometimes hinder children's play within the dramatic play area (Meacham et al., 2014). Meacham et al., (2014) argue that the issue is not whether teachers should participate in this kind of play, but how and when the teacher should use questioning strategies to encourage language development (Meacham et al., 2014).

Taken together these studies on professional development interventions have shown that the interventions improved teacher practices related to oral language and vocabulary development during playtime. The professional development models used in these studies included a variety of interventions related to specific language practices. Most of the professional development interventions used collaborative learning and provided coaching as support. Findings from these studies suggest that with the appropriate professional development model, teachers can be taught to provide the instructional strategies children need to enhance their oral language and vocabulary development during playtime (Hindman & Wasik, 2008; 2012; Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2006; Wasik & Hindman, 2011)

Conclusion

For my study, I used a professional development program focused on teacher-child conversations that provided the necessary strategies, to increase the amount and quality of the teacher-child conversations, and words learned. Drawing from this body of research, the strategies that informed my professional development content included meaningful and extended conversations, language modeling, cognitively challenging questions such as those that are open-ended and provide for opportunities for explanations, interpretations, and forming opinions, vocabulary strategies such as carrying on conversations to include the explanation of words used and establishing a language rich classroom environment used during playtime. It also included the teachers' role in play and how to use play as an avenue to teach.

From the professional development studies, the interventions that had the most impact were those that provided a particular professional development model that typically used coaching, reflective cycles of practice, and was ongoing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this case study was to examine a professional development initiative and teachers' responses to this initiative, therefore, a qualitative case study design was employed. A case study is "A qualitative strategy in which the researcher explores in depth one or more cases. The case is bound by time and activity, which is described by collecting detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 2009, p.13). This case study involved describing what takes place in a professional development initiative focused on the use of play activities to promote children's oral language and vocabulary and the how three preschool teachers take up and use this training over the course of three months. Qualitative data on three teachers' understandings and approaches to oral language instruction during play were collected through interviews, observations, and reflective responses. My goal in collecting this data was to create a description of the professional development initiative and the three teachers' responses to this intervention.

The overall question framing this study was:

1. What happens when I implement a PD program focused on improving the teaching of vocabulary and oral language during playtime?

The following questions guide this investigation:

2. What does the curriculum of the PD look like?

   a.) What activities do the teachers participate in and how do they respond?

   b.) Which aspects of the PD do teachers say are informative to their learning?

   c.) What do the teachers say could be improved about the PD?

3. What are the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play and their role in oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after a PD intervention?

a.) What are the teachers' beliefs about play in oral language and vocabulary

development before and after participating in the PD?

b.) What are the teachers' oral language and vocabulary practices during playtime before

and after participating in the PD?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in spring 2015 to explore the beliefs and practices of

teachers regarding the use of play in their classrooms. The questions guiding the pilot study

were as follows:

1. What are the teachers' beliefs regarding play in the preschool/early childhood learning

   environment?

2. What types of play activities are taking place in the preschool/early childhood

   classrooms?

   a. What are the teachers doing to support play as learning in their classrooms?

3. What are the differences between teachers' definitions and beliefs of play and the play-

   based strategies used in their classroom?

Seven teachers participated in the study, which involved the administration of an open-ended

survey, interviews, observations and the collection of artifacts, such as lesson plans and pictures.

Several findings were evident from the collection of this data. First, even though the

teachers stated that they valued play as a learning opportunity, teachers were not observed

facilitating play learning opportunities in many of the areas of the classroom during playtime.

Teachers were busy helping children with their product-driven activities, and teaching

conversations were focused on the completion of the activity. Conversations in the other areas of

the classroom where small groups of children were playing were minimal, and when they did

take place, they did not tend to support children's thinking, by using higher order questioning and extensive vocabulary. Second, the observation protocol I used did not have any specific behaviors on which to focus, therefore, it was difficult to gather detailed information about the teachers' interactions. In addition, I should have completed more than one observation for each teacher because one observation only provided a glimpse of teachers' daily practices. Therefore, in this study I used a more detailed observation protocol that included the use of a validated observation measure as well as detailed field notes and audio recordings. Third, my role as the director of the school seemed to influence how open teachers were about their beliefs and practices during the interviews. Therefore, for this study, a colleague from my doctoral support group, who is an experienced data collector, conducted all interviews. In what follows I outline the theoretical framework, setting, sample, data collection and analysis techniques that build on this pilot study.

Theory Based Logic Model

As this is a study of a professional development initiative aimed at improving three preschool teachers' oral language and vocabulary instruction during play, I drew on adult learning theories, effective professional development strategies, and teaching strategies that enhance the instruction of oral language and vocabulary to inform my professional development design. Key concepts from adult learning theories of experiential learning, collaboration, and situated learning in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as well as what is known about effective professional development approaches were used to inform the format for the six session professional development initiative. This professional development will establish opportunities for teachers to apply the oral language and vocabulary strategies taught in the professional development, time to collaborate, and reflect on their practice within a community

of learners. The content of the professional development was informed by the research base on

oral language and play based activities, specifically what is considered research best practices.

Figure 1 below outlines the logic that underpins this professional development initiative.

Adult Learning Theory

Experiential Learning
Situated Learning Theory
Collaboration

Effective Professional Development
Situated
Ongoing
Cycles of Inquiry
Individualized

Teaching Strategies

Meaningful & Extended Conversations

Language Modeling

Cognitively Challenging Questions: Open-ended that provide for opportunities for explanations, interpretations, forming opinions and hypothesis

Vocabulary strategies such as carrying on conversations to include the explanation of words used.

Establishing a language rich classroom environment

PD Format

Six Sessions, one session every two weeks

Opportunities for application and Reflection

Community of Learners

PD Content

Vocabulary: Word descriptions, explanation of terms and extension of words learned

Questions: Use of Cognitively Challenging during playtime

Conversations: How to make them Meaningful and Extended during playtime

Language Rich Play Classroom Environments

Building a Community of Learners

The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development for Preschoolers

The Teachers Role in play during playtime

Improvement of Teacher Practice

Observed increase in teachers' use of extended and meaningful conversations during playtime

Observed increase in the teachers' use of more cognitively challenging questions during playtime

Observed increase in the teachers' use of more sophisticated vocabulary during playtime

Alter teachers' beliefs about their role during playtime

Improve the SELA scores from the pre to the post observations
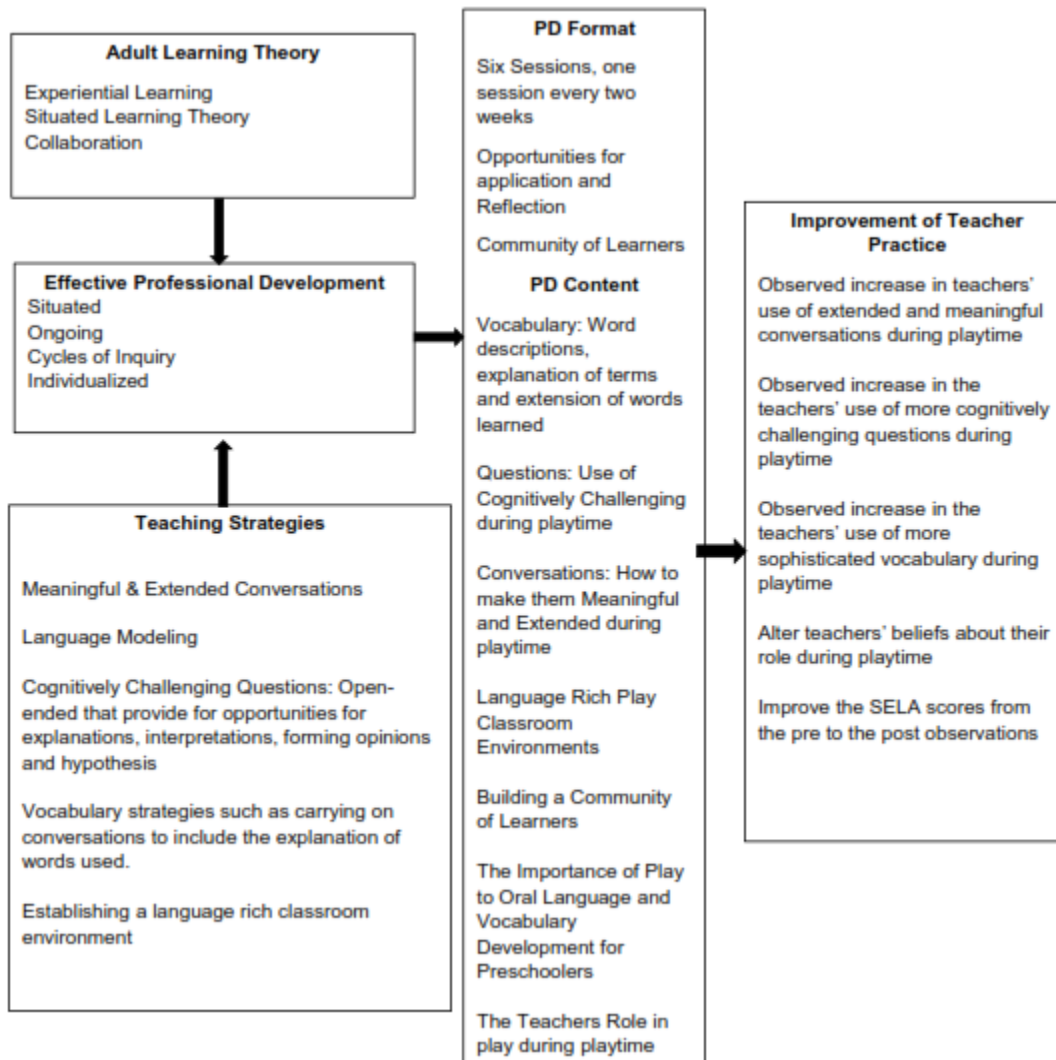
Figure 1: Theory based logic model of a professional development initiative.

Adult Learning Theory

Several adult learning theories inform the design of the professional development

initiative that was the focus of this study. These theories include the experiential learning theory

of Silberman, (2006) and the view that adult learning occurs when adults are provided

opportunities to collaborate on problems situated in their workplace or job (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

First, drawing on Silberman (2006), I assume that learning occurs not just from the knowledge a person is given but within the experience itself (Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 2011). Experiential learning involves not just rote or didactic learning where the learner is passive, but the learning that takes place through the activities in which the learner participates. It takes several exposures to really understand and grasp new concepts (Silberman, 2006) and experience helps adults to learn and apply new knowledge. "Moving away from simply telling teachers what to do and providing them with an on-site, hands-on experience during which they are able to create innovative curriculum and practice it with support" (Burk, 2013, p. 260) is a key component of experimental learning and one that was included in this professional development.

In addition to the importance of adults having time to experience the learning being advocated, I use the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) who suggest that adult learning also needs to be collaborative. Adults need the opportunity to discuss, ask questions and practice the new information for real learning to occur (Silberman, 2006). Several bodies of research such as Garet et al. (2001), Little (1982), and Wood (2007), found that schools that had a collective focus and collaborative practices, had higher levels of student achievement than schools where teachers worked in isolation. These scholars argue, therefore, that professional development initiatives should bring teachers together to work on common problems of practice as communities of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory suggests that adult learning occurs through job embedded practices, and that the context itself shapes the learning (Merriam &

Bierma, 2014). The learning happens when the teachers use strategies with the children within their own classroom environment. It is important therefore that teacher learning is situated in the realities of teachers' work, so that they learn in actual classrooms, and through reflection and collaboration with their colleagues. In other words professional learning opportunities need to be job embedded in the everyday activities of the learner if adult learning is to occur.

In the professional development initiative, teacher learning took place not only during the professional development time together, but also extended into the classrooms. Drawing from experiential theory the professional development is designed with time in between each workshop session so that teachers could try out oral language and vocabulary strategies taught in their own classrooms. When the three teachers and I came together we had the opportunity to collaboratively discuss the oral language and vocabulary strategies they have implemented in their practice.

Effective Professional Development for Teachers of Preschoolers

One-time training sessions have been found to be ineffective (Little, 1993; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love & Stiles, 1998; Silberman, 2006) in facilitating change and improvement in teachers' practices. A number of studies have identified certain characteristics that stand out as providing positive effects on teachers' knowledge and skills as well as changes in their classroom practices (Desimone, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Zaslow, 2014). These characteristics include, a focus on content knowledge, the opportunities for active learning, and certain structural features that include collective participation with individuals from the same school working together as a community of learners over time (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001).

In general, the research on effective professional development for teachers in K-12 schools, and early childhood teachers, (Linder, Rembert, Simpson & Ramey, 2015; McCann, Jones & Arnold, 2012) have found that if teachers are to learn, the professional development needs to focus on not only the teachers' knowledge of how children develop, but about their knowledge of specific teaching practices (Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 2011). Quality professional development needs to include current, research-based instructional practices (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Early et al., 2007) for it to be relevant and make an impact on children's learning. Teachers need to know what to do in terms of the instructional practices and understand why that strategy is important for a child's development. They need both the conceptual and procedural information (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Without both, the professional development will just provide activities to be completed, instead of integrating the learning into the language and literacy of the classroom environment (Wasik & Hindman, 2011).

Professional Development Model

Assuming that adults learn through experience, and collaboration in job-embedded ways, and that effective professional development must be ongoing to allow for teachers to reflect on practice, this professional development initiative was structured as a community of learners, conducted over a period of three months beginning in April and continuing through June. Each professional development session was approximately one hour long and was held on Wednesday afternoons in the church library. After each session the teachers were provided a skill development activity, which were completed in the context of their own classrooms, and the classrooms of the other participants. Using a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" (National School Reform Faculty, 2012) we met one week after each of the training sessions to reflect upon the experiences. After this reflection and collaborative session the teachers returned to

their classrooms and continue to focus on the skill learned during that session. At the beginning

of the next session and the remaining ones, we began with our findings and reflection from the

previous week using a protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for

Reflection and Analysis" (National School Reform Faculty, 2012). The training schedule

included six sessions, with a teaching strategy aimed at building oral language and vocabulary

development every other week.

       The curriculum implementation schedule of the six professional development sessions

(see Table 1) (see Appendix F for the professional development curriculum) was derived from

research on best practices in oral language and vocabulary development. Drawing from my

literature review the teaching strategies that were addressed in this professional development

included meaningful and extended conversations, cognitively challenging questions, and

vocabulary learning through play (Cabell, et al., 2015; Cabell, et al., 2011; Hansen, 2004;

Justice, 2004; Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Neuman et al., 2011; Zucker, et al., 2010). Providing

these strategies in a language rich environment has been shown to have positive outcomes for

children's literacy skills (Beals & Tabors, 1995; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Huttenloher,

Vasilyeva, Cymerman & Levine, 2002; Morrow, 2012; Smith & Dickinson, 1995). In addition,

the foundational knowledge about the nature of language and literacy development (Dickinson,

McCabe & Clark-Chiarelli, 2004) and how oral language and vocabulary skills can be used

during play was addressed. To facilitate meaningful learning the final session of the professional

development brought professional development work together as we reviewed our findings and

reflections and decided on our next step as a community of learners.

Table 1

Curriculum Implementation Schedule

Session 1 **April 6**	**The Importance of Play and Literacy and the Language Rich Play Environment** Situated Activity/Skill Development: Identify improvements that can be made to each classroom area to establish or enhance a literacy rich play environment in that area. Visit the other classrooms and observe the literacy rich classroom areas and identify the strengths as well as improvements to be made: April 6 –12
Reflection Session *April 13*	**Focus: Literacy Rich Play Environment** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 1
Session 2 **April 20**	**The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development** Situated Activity/Skill Development: Focus on the teaching of playful learning related to oral language and vocabulary development and linked to developmentally appropriate practices: April 20 -27
Reflection Session *April 27*	**Focus: Oral Language taking place during Playtime** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 2
Session 3 **April 20**	**The Teachers' Role in Oral Language and Vocabulary through Play** Situated Activity/Skill Development: Focus on the teachers' role during playtime and identify the roles that you take on during playtime: April 20-27
Reflection Session *April 27*	**Focus: The Teachers' Role during Playtime** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 3
Session 4 **May 4**	**Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime**

	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify the use of extending and meaningful conversations: May 4 – May 10
Reflection Session *May 11*	**Focus: The Teachers use of extended and meaningful conversations during playtime and the use of the strategies learned** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 4
Session 5 **May 18**	**Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime (continued)** Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify the use of cognitively challenging questions during conversations: May 18 – May 24
Reflection Session *May 25*	**Focus: The Teachers use of extended and meaningful conversations during playtime and the use of the strategies learned** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 5
Session 6 **June 1**	**Putting it All Together: Review strategies and discuss how to overcome any obstacles preventing the use of them.** Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify strategies being used to build vocabulary and use conversations in the other classrooms: June 1 – June 7
Reflection Session *June 8*	**Focus: The effective strategies being used to build vocabulary and use conversations** Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 6

Research Setting

This case study was conducted at a private, non-profit, half-day preschool serving children ages two and a half through six years of age. The school is a Christian preschool that obtained accreditation from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2009 and recently completed the five-year renewal process. There are only 257 schools in the state of New Jersey that have obtained this accreditation. To continue to maintain and improve the quality of the program, the school has recently been accepted to participate in New Jersey's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) known as Grow NJ Kids.

The preschool is located in an upper-middle class community in central New Jersey. There are other preschools in the surrounding area, as well as one K-8 elementary school. When they reach school age, about 25% of the children attend the local school, and 75% of the children are sent to the surrounding districts. In 2010 the population of this community was 2,181 people with a median age of 46.5 years. The community is predominantly White (81%), with 11% Asian, almost 4% Black and the remainder of the population consisting of Hispanic and various races (http://www.city-data.com/city/Cranbury-New-Jersey.html). The estimated median household income in 2013 was $155,080 and the median house value in 2013 was $619,068.

There are approximately 120 children in the school. The children are divided into nine classrooms. Class sizes range from twelve to sixteen children, depending on the room size and the age of the children. There are 22 staff members. Seven teachers have a NJ teaching certification, and one of these teachers is also a reading specialist. One teacher has an early childhood degree, but no teaching certification. The school has eight assistant teachers. The remaining staff members are lunch program teachers, clerical, and administrative staff members. Most assistant teachers have earned a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. In

addition to the half-day preschool program, which is two and a half hours in length, there is a

lunch program five days a week, and extended day activities through a variety of two-hour

enrichment classes.

Sample

From the population of twenty-two staff members a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of

three teachers (see Table 1) used for this case study. This convenience sample (Merriam, 2009)

of teachers had been selected because these individuals teach in one of our four-year-old and

five-year-old classes, and therefore had the most impact on students' literacy development prior

to their entrance into kindergarten. This purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) was used to provide

the information to examine a PD initiative to increase literacy skills, with a focus on vocabulary

and oral language development during playtime.

As can be seen in Table 2, each of the three teachers has a Bachelor's degree and holds a

range of certifications including NJ Nursery School and NJ Elementary School Certification. All

three teachers have taught preschool from between five to fifteen years.

Table 2

Participants

Teacher Identification	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience Teaching Preschool	Years in Current Position	Qualifications
Valerie	39 (mostly in kindergarten and first grade)	5 years	2 years	NJ Nursery School Certification, issued in 1976 NJ Elementary School Teacher Certification, issued in 1976 B.S. in Early Childhood from The College of New Jersey in 1976

| Faith | 15 years (mostly in 5th grade and 7th grade) | 6 (4 of which were only summers) | 3 years | NJ Elementary School Teacher Certification, issued in 1988 B.A. in Psychology/Elem Ed from Immaculata College in 1998 |
| Kristen | 18 years | 15 years | 15 | NJ Elementary School Teacher Certification, issued in 2001 B.S. from The College of New Jersey in 1997 |

Each teacher was given the opportunity to freely decide whether to participate in the study and could have withdrawn at any time. They were each be asked to complete an informed consent document (see Appendix A).

Data Collection Procedures

A case study design usually incorporates multiple sources of data to ensure that a description of the case can be reported. Creswell defines this type of design in qualitative research as an approach where the researcher explores a case over time using various methods of collecting the details (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009). It is a detailed description followed by an analysis of the information or data (Stake, 1995; Wolcot, 1994). In keeping with recommended practices for conducting a case study, I employed several procedures to inquire into teachers' knowledge and practices of vocabulary and oral language development during playtime in their classrooms before, and after the professional development initiative. These procedures included interviews, observations, and teacher- researcher-reflections.

Interviews

Interviews enabled me to elicit teachers' beliefs and understandings of oral language, and vocabulary development. The interviews also helped gather teachers' evaluations of the

professional development and what they learned from the professional development. To achieve these purposes, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher, one prior to the professional development and one following its completion.

The first interview aimed to elicit teachers' beliefs about oral language and vocabulary and how they believe they support children's literacy development in these areas. Questions were grouped into three categories – knowledge and practices in literacy, knowledge and practice in oral language and vocabulary development and learning during playtime. The second interview aimed to elicit teachers' understanding of the changes that happened regarding their understanding of oral language and vocabulary development, as well as the literacy learning that takes place during playtime. It is also aimed at learning about each teachers' perspective on the PD, what they learned or did not learn, and how the PD could be improved.

The semi-structured interview format (Merriam, 2009) was used to allow control over the questions, and provided the opportunity to probe further when necessary. Probing helped me to clarify and pursue additional information about what teachers knew about vocabulary and oral language development (Patton, 2002). Drawing on Patton (2002) different types of questions were used in both interview protocols, such as experience questions, knowledge, and opinion questions, with the aim of obtaining as much rich information as possible. See Appendix B for these interview protocols.

All interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes and were audiotaped. Interviews took place at a time and place convenient to participants. As I am the director of the center, a colleague from the doctoral support group, who is an experienced data collector, conducted the interviews. By having a neutral colleague conduct the interviews, I hoped the teachers felt comfortable and could speak honestly about their literacy beliefs and practices and about their

experiences in the professional development. After the interviews were completed the colleague

and I had the opportunity to debrief to identify and capture any observational details or

interesting findings that might have been relevant to this study.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interviews had

taken place. As part of the transcription I also reviewed the interview notes and listened to the

audio recording to capture as much of the details as possible. Once the transcription was

complete I asked each participant to review the transcripts of the interview for accuracy. This

gave teachers the opportunity to make changes and verify what was written. The interviews

were labeled by name, number and date and were saved in a computer file for each teacher.

Observations

I completed all observations of the teachers. These observations were conducted in two

ways, through the administration of the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) (Smith,

Davidson, Weisenfeld & Dennis, 2001), and through monthly qualitative observations using field

notes. These observations provided first-hand descriptions of teachers' classroom practices

before, during, and after the professional development initiative. Researcher-generated-

reflections of each PD session were also completed through reflective notes and audio recordings

using a digital voice recorder.

SELA. SELA is an observation tool (see Appendix C) that provides specific information

regarding classroom practices that support children's early literacy skills, including items related

to oral language and vocabulary. It was developed based on research and professional opinions

regarding best practices, taking into consideration the development of young children. The

SELA has been administered in several studies, such as Barnett et al., (2008), Lamy et al., (2004)

and Frede et al., (2007) and in various early childhood settings (e.g. Head Start programs in

Washington DC, and Abbott preschool programs in New Jersey; Barnett et al., 2008; Frede et al., 2007; Lamy et al., 2004). Frede et al. (2007) and Barnett et al. (2008), found that this instrument was an internally consistent measure of the early literacy environment and practices.

The full tool consists of 21 items that focus on the literate environment, language development, phonological awareness, letters and words, parent involvement, knowledge of print and book concepts, as well as developmentally appropriate practice. Each of the items is rated on a five-point scale, with a five reflecting best practice and a one indicating the absence of, or very low quality for, that indicator. For the purposes of this study I did not use four items, two of which are related to parent involvement, which was not part of this study, and two of which are related to bilingual and non-English speaking children, who were not part of the classrooms related to the study. Therefore the modified SELA will consisted of 17 items. This observation tool was completed twice, once before the PD, and then again after the completion of the PD.

Field notes. On the days I did not use SELA I conducted qualitative observations of teacher talk and action during play time, both indoor and outdoor. Observing outdoors allowed me to watch teachers when they were not focused on craft activities. An observation protocol (see Appendix D) was used to focus my attention on the conversations, and interactions taking place, and what actions the teachers were taking to incorporate oral language and vocabulary learning in play. I also used this protocol to observe the roles the teacher took on during playtime. I recorded my field notes manually using a printed out observation guide that was dated and labeled by teacher. To supplement my notes lead teachers' conversations were recorded using a digital voice recorder.

At the beginning of each observation I did a scan of the classroom to look for the literacy materials being used, how the classroom environment was set up. Acting as an "observer

participant" (Merriam, 2009) I positioned myself in a way to hear what the teacher said and followed her around the room and playground as she moved to different groups of children. I followed the lead teacher for one hour in the classroom and twenty minutes outside for each observation recording my field notes and audiotaping teacher talk. These observations concentrated on how each teacher was intentionally teaching oral language and vocabulary skills.

At the end of each day's observation I transformed my field jottings to field notes by going through the classroom talk and trying to fill out any notes I had taken with explicit teacher and child talk, and any contextual details that I recollected. After completing field notes on the teacher I wrote memos to myself. These memos included notes about key things that helped me to answer my research questions and methodological notes to help me with any changes I needed to make for my next observation. Using these memos I reflected on what I saw that day drawing on Miles & Huberman (1994). I asked myself questions such as, what were the main issues or themes in this contact, what new or remaining questions do I have for the next contact, what did I get or fail to get during the observation, and what did I find salient, interesting, illuminating or important (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I manually wrote these reflections at the bottom of the field notes. Field notes were dated, labeled by teacher, numbered and filed on the computer ready for analysis.

Researcher-generated-reflection. Following each PD session I listened to the audio recording from each session and manually wrote any notes that informed the next PD session. I reflected upon the experiences and events as well as the implementation of the instruction I provided, and the teaching strategies I used. I also reflected upon the teachers' participation, and the overall tone and learning environment.

Teacher-Generated-Reflections

After each training session the participants were asked to complete a reflection response sheet (see Appendix E). This was created using my theoretical framework, which suggests that adult learning is best supported through teachers reflecting on what they are learning and how they are thinking about the professional development session in terms of their own practice. Teachers learn by reflecting on the experiences they have (Dewey, 1933) which makes this an important part of the experience. Yinger & Clark (1989) believed that reflection that is written is more powerful than oral reflection (Yinger & Clark, 1989). Reflecting upon each PD session provided the opportunity to examine what was working and gave insight into what should be continued, built upon or enhanced (Biddle, 2012).

This teacher-generated-response sheet (see Appendix E) was used to obtain as many details from the teacher participant about each PD session. These reflective responses were given to each teacher during the PD and online for them one day after each PD session. The teachers were asked to complete them within the week. I reminded them by e-mail within a few days to complete them. Each of these responses were labeled by teacher name, number, and date and saved in a computer file for each teacher.

As a teacher researcher I had four files on my computer, data about the PD activity, notes, documents shared, teacher reflections on the PD and three files for each individual teacher with all their observations and interviews and their reflections on the PD. Data for this study was collected according to the following timeline, see Appendix E.

Table 3 identifies how each data source answered each of my research questions.

Table 3

Research Questions by Data Source

Research Question	Interview	Observation Field Notes	Observation SELA	Teacher-generated-reflection

What does the curriculum of the PD look like?	X			X
What activities do the teachers participate in?				X
Which aspects of the PD do teachers say are informative to their learning?	X			X
What do the teachers say could be improved about the PD?	X			X
What are the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after a PD intervention?	X	X	X	
What are the teachers' beliefs about oral language and vocabulary development before and after participating in the PD?	X			
What are the teachers' practices around oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after participating in the PD?		X	X	

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is the process of making sense and meaning of the data (Merriam, 2009). This process is both recursive and dynamic and should happen along with data collection (Merriam, 2009). I began by first looking at the interviews, observations and teacher reflections as soon as possible after each data source was collected for each teacher and each PD session. I wrote up any of my comments, notes, and memos about my findings as I read these data sources. I read and reread the field notes from the observations, the SELA assessment, the interview transcripts, and the responsive reflections completed by each teacher

after every training session to get a sense and understanding of the data for a preliminary analysis.

To begin the formal analysis process I organized all the data records for analysis. Everything was in typed format, dated, and organized by teacher or professional development curriculum, and ready for analysis. Using an excel spreadsheet, I reviewed memos and notes to see what data might address my research questions and themes that had become evident during analysis. All the data was sorted and coded by research question and teacher. There were separate tabs on the excel spreadsheet for the categories of literacy knowledge, literacy practices, play activities, both indoor and outdoor, and professional development.

Analysis of the Professional Development (PD)

To describe the teacher's experiences in the PD, I began by sorting the dataset in response to my main research questions. Data that talks about the PD curriculum, and the data related to teacher's beliefs and practices before and after the PD was sorted by teachers. I took all the data related to curriculum and tried to describe the curriculum and how the teachers responded to it, what they got out of it, and what they said needs to be improved. This involved coding the data set related to curriculum into further subcategories related to my research questions. That is, I coded the curriculum data set for curriculum activities and processes, teacher learning, and how the PD could have been improved. I then sorted the data by code reading carefully using my theoretical framework to identify codes that captured specific aspects of the PD curriculum as well as for anything interesting, potentially relevant or important to my study (Merriam, 2009). I was also open to codes that were in the data and not necessarily reflective of my theoretical framework. For a code to have strength it must be found in at least

two data sources, for example, from the observations and interviews. I then sorted the data again by code and wrote descriptive summaries to capture the data pertaining to each code.

Finally, I looked across the codes to discern relationships among codes that might be captured in larger patterns or themes. These themes were used to describe the PD and its perceived impacts and areas of improvement.

Analysis to Construct Teachers' Cases

The next step in data analysis was to create a mini case study for each teacher. I took all the data from teacher one and drew on my theoretical framework and from the data itself to come up with codes or categories. The construction of these categories began as a highly inductive process, however, as the process continued and I reached the point where I realized there was no new information, the process became more deductive as I used my theoretical framework (Merriam, 2009). I coded for beliefs and practices. I tried to describe what the teachers said, and what they did before and after the PD. I took all the data and described what I saw taking place. This involved looking at the relationships between codes and trying to interpret larger patterns or themes in relation to my research questions. I wrote a descriptive summary of the themes for teacher one, which was used to support the findings.

At the completion of this phase I had a descriptive portrait of teacher one. This case record included all the important information, compiled into a comprehensive package (Merriam, 2009). It gave me a complete picture of this teacher's interaction with the children regarding literacy strategies used during play from a variety of sources. The same analytic process was then followed for teachers two and three.

Researcher Role

I separated my role as the director of the school from my role as a researcher. As the director of this school and the supervisor of these teachers, I routinely conduct surveys, make observations to provide changes in teacher practices, as well as provide most, if not all, of the professional development for the teachers. I am more of an instructional coach rather than a supervisor. We have a personnel committee who is ultimately responsible for personnel hiring and offering contracts to all personnel. Therefore, the authority to make determinations on personnel is vested in this committee, which makes it less likely that my role as the director will impact the teachers' responses.

During the data collection process, I separated my role as the director of the school from my role as a researcher. Using a researcher journal I continuously reflected upon my own beliefs and perceptions regarding the planning and implementation of each PD session to keep myself in check reviewing the notes I made after each session.

Validity

Qualitative case study research requires considerable verification about people acting in events (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers define validation as a goal rather than a product (Maxwell, 2005). It is important to minimize any threats which included the procedures, treatments or experiences of the participants that change or threaten the researcher's ability to gather correct details or draw incorrect inferences (Creswell, 2009). To ensure the validity of my research design I utilized several strategies.

First, I used a strategy known as triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories that will cross check and compare the data collected (Merriam, 2009). To triangulate, I coded using multiple

sources of data including observations, interviews and data collection. For a code to be valid it

had to be evident in more than one data source (Merriam, 2009). Second, I used peer review,

which included the examination or review by a colleague who was familiar with the research to

assess whether the findings are realistic based on the data collected (Merriam, 2009). In this

case, members of my dissertation group helped me question my analytic techniques and coding

schemes. Third, I used member checks (Merriam, 2009) to rule out any misinterpretation of the

teachers' interview details. I asked each teacher to review their interview transcripts and if any

misinterpretation was identified giving the teacher the opportunity to better capture their

perspective.

     In what follows, the findings of this study are reported. I begin by describing what

happened when I implemented a professional development initiative on improving the teaching

of vocabulary and oral language during playtime. I describe the curriculum and explained each

of the pedagogies used. Each of the teacher participants responses to the PD intervention varied.

The findings for each will be described in mini-case studies showing what each teacher

participant's practice was before the PD intervention, their participation in the PD and then what

their practices looked like during and after the PD intervention. Then, the data will be used to

revise the PD initiative.

CHAPTER 4: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Introduction

Play has always been considered important to learning in early childhood, but because it is defined as a child-initiated activity, teachers may not always capitalize on the learning opportunities within play. Children often use props and materials to pretend during play, which promotes and encourages the use of language. This can be seen in children's dramatic play when children are engaged for extended periods of time and act out roles that go beyond their existing experiences. Preschool teachers need to be intentional in their interactions during playtime in order to build on a child's learning. However, given the complexity of teaching during playtime, and the pressures to teach the more "academic" subject matter, teachers might not feel comfortable using children's play as a teaching space (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Morrow, Roskos & Gambrell, 2016).

In this chapter I describe a professional development initiative that I implemented with the intent to help three teachers use playtime as an instructional event for children to learn vocabulary and oral language. I answer the overall question framing this study of what happens when I implement a PD program focused on improving the teaching of vocabulary and oral language during playtime. To answer this question, I begin by describing what the curriculum of the PD looked like.

Overview of the Professional Development

Meaningful professional development opportunities should take place over a period of time, so that teachers can try out strategies and discuss their experiences with other teachers. When professional development opportunities are provided over time, they give participants time to reflect on what they are learning and to experiment with this new learning in practice.

Providing extended time for teachers to test out what they are learning is more likely to lead to sustained improvements in practice (Garet et al., 2001).

To ensure that participants had opportunities to learn over time, rather than the more traditional one-day workshop sessions and practice the content being examined, the PD initiative was comprised of two components. The first component was a series of workshop sessions. This component consisted of six sessions provided every two weeks following a similar format and structure. The content of the workshops was based on the research on oral language development and play-based activities (Beals & Tabors, 1995; Cabell et al., 2015; Dickinson, McCabe & Clark-Chiarelli, 2004; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hansen, 2004; Justice, 2004; Morrow, 2012; Neuman et al., 2011; Smith & Dickinson, 1995; Zucker et al., 2010). The design of each session provided the teachers with strategies they could use to enhance children's oral language and vocabulary through play. At the end of each workshop session, the teacher participants were given an assignment to complete in their own practices.

The second component was comprised of reflection sessions. This was a time when we met between workshop sessions to discuss and reflect on the assigned activity from the previous workshop session. The time in between workshop sessions gave the teacher participants the opportunity to try out the literacy practices that were being discussed in the workshop sessions. I hoped that being able to apply the acquired knowledge in practice would bring the content of the workshops and the reflection session components together for each teacher, by allowing the teacher participants to try out in their own classroom practice what was examined in the workshops.

Table 4 below provides an overview of the objectives and key activities for each of the PD workshops and reflection sessions. These PD workshops and reflective sessions are explained in greater detail in subsequent paragraphs.

Table 4

Overview of the PD Initiative

Session	Topic	Objectives	Key Activities
PD Session 1: April 6	The Importance of Play and Establishing a Literacy Rich Environment	• Identify the attributes of a language-rich classroom environment and make improvements • Assess and evaluate appropriate props and materials to increase opportunities for oral language development	• Use "Active Knowledge Sharing" (Silberman, 2006) for a "quick write" • Analyze video examples of appropriate props and materials for oral language development • Shared reading discussion using protocol: Four "A"s (Gray, 2005) • Create a literacy enhanced classroom environment as a group
Reflection Session 1: April 13			• Identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in classrooms and interest areas using Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)

PD Session 2: April 20 AM	The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development	• Identify evidence of oral language during indoor and outdoor playtime • Identify and analyze the role of play in oral language and vocabulary development of preschoolers.	• Use protocol "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) • Use "Active Knowledge Sharing" (Silberman, 2006) for a "quick write" • Analyze examples of the integration of oral language and early literacy
Reflective Session 2: April 27			• Identify the conversations happening during the indoor and outdoor playtime using Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Session 3 April 20 PM	The Teachers' Role in Oral Language and Vocabulary Development through Play	• Identify and analyze the roles of the teacher during playtime, focusing on the roles that promote oral language and vocabulary development.	• Protocol "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) • Analyze vignettes for examples of the children's cues of when to enter and exit play • Analyze a scenario of how to bring children's play to a high level of mature play
Reflective Session 3: April 27			• Identify the roles of the teachers and assistants during indoor and outdoor playtime using Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)

PD Session 4 May 4	Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime	• Analyze examples of play scenarios to identify strategies used that extend and provide opportunities for meaningful conversations 1. Extending conversation 2. Modeling conversation 3. Building opportunities to talk 4. Using complex language and vocabulary	• Use the Protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) • Analyze video examples of building opportunities to talk, modeling conversations and using complex language and vocabulary
Reflective Session 4: May 11			• Identify how teachers and assistants use the strategies during the indoor and outdoor playtime using Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Session 5: May 18	Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime-Continued	• Analyze key conversation elements; active listening, child's level, conversation tone and reciprocal exchanges • Identify the level and frequency of question types	• Use Protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) • Shared reading discussion using protocol: Four "A"s (Gray, 2005) • Review Bloom's Taxonomy Revised
Reflective Session 5: May 25			• Identify examples of active listening and reciprocal exchanges using the Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) Identify the use of higher order questions and expanding on children's words and ideas using the Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)

PD Session 6: June 1	Putting it All Together: Review Strategies and Discuss How to Overcome Obstacles	• Integrate meaningful conversations to promote vocabulary and oral language during playtime.	• Use protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National Reform Faculty, 2012) • Discussion of the obstacles to having meaningful conversations using a protocol • Review of the language arts and language standards in NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards
Reflective Session 6: June 8			• Identify the language arts literacy standards used in the teacher's lesson plans in May using Protocol: "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)

Professional Development Workshops

It is just about 11:30am; I have everything ready for the first PD Session so I wait for the teacher participants to arrive and our first session to begin. Valerie arrives about five minutes later and we talk about the morning she had and if one of the children in her class who had been sick came back to school. Faith arrives shortly after, and all three of us begin getting our lunch. The last teacher participant, Kristen, arrives at 11:45am saying, "I had a few parents that picked up late."

On the table in front of each of the teacher participants is a piece of paper asking them to, "Please take a few minutes to write about your memory of learning to read and write." This activity, called a "quick write," was intended to help them begin thinking about the topic of literacy, and how it directly related to their own experiences. Faith and Valerie began eating while completing the "quick write" activity, while Kristen went to the bathroom. Faith said, "I remember when Connor (her son) wrote his name for the first time. It was a big deal. He was four or five. It was at the beach house and he was sitting with his feet under him and used chalk to write his name."

Once Kristen returned and completed the quick write, we begin discussing what each teacher had written. Kristen states, "I don't remember writing, but I did learn to read at an early age. My sister is nine years older than me and I remember sitting at the table, and I always read the letters on the cereal boxes. I would say C H E E R I O S and then ask what does that say. My sister would get so annoyed with me. I was around four."

After Kristen spoke, Faith took her turn. "My only memory was in kindergarten and we needed to give the teacher five words so she could write them on a flash card. My brother's name is Calvin and we called him Cal. The teacher thought I said cow, so cow and Cal were two of my words."

Valerie said, "We must have had books. Kindergarten was in an old building with a fireplace with nursery rhyme tiles. We had nap time."

After allowing time for everyone to speak, I start the content part of the session saying, "I have a PowerPoint to show that relates to what we have been talking about." I begin showing the PowerPoint and read details about play and its importance in literacy development. As part of the PowerPoint presentation I show two short video clips. The first one depicts a teacher's classroom and how, together with her children, they set up a café in the dramatic play area. After the video, Valerie said, "She has a nice set up." Kristen said, "She had a lot of space." Faith mentioned seeing a washer and dryer in the video. Kristen said, "We once had a washer and dryer and the children did not use the equipment appropriately. They would put the babies and food in the washer and dryer and that made me nervous. I don't think I would add another piece of equipment to my room."

We then move onto second video. The adults in the video are quietly working. After a few minutes, the facilitator in the video asks the adults to work together and use whatever materials they wanted. Kristen asked, "What are those things they were using? It looks like packing materials. That person is not very creative." I said, "Did you hear that happy hum?" Kristen said, "There is a lot of conversation." I said, "The materials they were using were things they found, not expensive. Don't they look more engaged, and they were sharing their thoughts and ideas? What a difference there is when playing with only one material. How important it is for communication and play and oral language. Kristen said, "There is always one child that says, 'this is mine' and won't share with anyone." Faith said, "They might say, 'I had them first.'"

I shared a slide on the PowerPoint about "What literacy was and is today" and how it's necessary for children's academic success and wellbeing.

We then use a protocol to discuss the previously distributed article, "Building Language and Literacy through Play" (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Using the protocol, "Four "A" s Text Protocol School Reform Initiative, A Community of Learners," each teacher was asked to share the assumptions they thought the text held, what they agreed with, and what they would argue with or aspire to about the article.

I say, "The author made an assumption that children always use props in an imaginary way." Kristen replies, "The author assumed that when children use less realistic items, more imaginative play is promoted." Valerie chimes in, "The author assumed that all children played in a similar way and I don't think that's always the case." Kristen, says, "all teachers have questions about play." Valerie, Faith and I agree. Faith comments, "I have questions about play especially when teachers should intervene in the play." Valerie says "play is an opportune time to encourage oral language development, whether familiar play or imaginary play."

I ask, "What does this mean for our work with the children at our school?" Valerie responds, "I would add more props to encourage familiar items to be other things." Kristen said, "The children don't use the money in the cash register. They swipe everything." Faith said, "I don't think they know what to do with the cash. I think our kids are very imaginative, but we want to bring them to a higher level. I think changing our props and adding new things would help."

I then give the three teachers a diagram of a classroom and ask them to work together to transform the physical environment of the classroom to support greater literacy learning (see figure X below). A rich conversation ensued:

Faith: Where is the block area? We need to add that area.
Kristen: Here are the blocks. We could rearrange the room.
Faith: Let us put the blocks here. We should add books. Some of the children in my class have been building fire and police scenes. We should add materials to enhance their building.
Kristen: My children build NYC or Brigantine Beach. We should put some geography books in that area.
Valerie: We could add maps and a globe. We had them there last year because of someone's interest. We could put them here. (She pointed to an area near the blocks.)
Kristen: We need a little table. Do you like this layout? Some things you need to live with, but blocks do not work in the middle of the floor.
Valerie: Let us move the sand and water table by the blocks and move the art area down. That should give us more room for the blocks.

This session lasted about one hour. Before we left the session, I give the teachers an assignment to complete for our reflective session scheduled for the following week. Kristen and Valerie went home, while Faith went to teach the pm class.

Figure 2. Literacy-rich environment created by the three teacher participants in the first workshop.

This vignette is taken from the first session and is typical of the format of each PD workshop. Nearly every PD workshop included a PowerPoint presentation, which helped to organize the information on literacy development and teaching that I focused on that day. I targeted concepts and strategies that researchers suggest contribute to the oral language and vocabulary development of preschoolers. By sharing the research supporting these concepts and strategies with the teacher participants I hoped to give them a better understanding of the role they can play and the strategies they can use to enhance children's oral language and vocabulary development during playtime.

PD content. The content of the PD workshop sessions consisted of those strategies and play based activities that has been shown to have positive outcomes for children's oral language

and vocabulary development (Beals & Tabor, 1995; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Huttenloher et al., 2002; Morrow, 2012; Smith & Dickinson, 1995). As the developer of the curriculum each week I focused on playtime as a time for learning oral language and vocabulary. I chose topics that not only provided the teacher participants with the importance of language and literacy development for preschoolers, but those that showed how play could be used as a teaching opportunity for learning these skills.

The PD workshops began with how play provides a risk-free context for children to practice and experiment with language and literacy (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009). In order for the teacher participants to use these skills during playtime, I shared language-related instructional practices, such as helping children use props and materials in various ways, exposing children to different experiences and themes, helping children play with a purpose by establishing a literacy rich environment (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Morrow, 1990). Research supports the importance of having a literacy rich environment that includes materials to support conversations, reading, and writing (Heroman & Jones, 2010).

The second PD workshop focused on the relationship of play to literacy development and the role of play in teaching literacy skills to young children. I shared with the teacher participants the literacy skills children learn through play such as the purpose of written language (Puckett et al., 2009), new and various vocabulary, in addition to verbal and non-verbal communication (Bergen & Mauer, 2000; Neumann & Roskos, 1992; 1993). In order for teachers to use play as an instructional avenue for teaching oral language and vocabulary, they first must understand play and how it can be used to develop these skills. With misunderstandings and differences of opinions regarding the benefits gained from play experiences, it is necessary to know that the most beneficial play is play that is purposeful, complex, and engaging (Hirsh-

Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009). This type of play does not just happen. Teachers need

to be intentional in their planning. How the teacher provides play opportunities for children to

learn oral language and vocabulary was an important learning component of this PD session.

Therefore, in the second PD workshop session, we discussed playtime in early childhood

classrooms as a time for children to explore, discover and learn about their world in the various

areas of the classroom. I provided the teacher participants with ways that they could challenge

play by planning, managing and improving activities that stimulate pretending, and involve

complex roles and processes. This is an indirect way of teachers being intentional in the

planning of play.

Some teachers believe that they do not have a role in children's play, however, several

studies have examined what the teachers were doing during playtime in the various areas of the

classroom, such as blocks, dramatic play, etc. (Connor et al., 2006; de Rivera et al., 2005;

Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Kontos, 1999; Massey et al., 2008).

Kontos (1999) revealed that variables such as the teacher talk and involvement with children

during free play impacted the kinds of conversations taking place. Having meaningful

conversations with children and using more complex vocabulary are critical to the development

of children's oral language (Girolmaetto & Weitzman, 2002; Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Kontos &

Wilcox-Herzog, 1997). Therefore, the third PD workshop session focused on the teachers' role

during play. Teachers need to facilitate and enhance children's play in order for play to be used

as an avenue for children's literacy and language development. Knowing when to enter and exit

play is vital to providing this type of support. If you enter play at the wrong time teachers may

disrupt the play. Instead teachers need to be able to enter play within the script of the children

and be able to validate the play scenario and encourage it to keep it going. It is also important to

know when to exit the play so teachers give children opportunities to direct their play as much as possible. I shared with the teacher participants the times when they should enter and exit to enhance play for the play to be more complex and purposeful. I explained that they need to pick up on the children's cues and signals by carefully observing the children during playtime. Play becomes more valuable when adults provide the appropriate amount of support to help the children sustain play. This can be a difficult task to accomplish, but is so important for teachers to understand. Play becomes more valuable when teachers provide just the right amount of support to get the play going and additional support so the play can be sustained by the children.

Once teachers have established an enriched literacy environment and they understand the importance of play to literacy development and their role in play, they need a command of the strategies they can use to build on children's literacy learning as they play. Workshops four and five, therefore, were focused on exploring the strategies of questioning, having extended and meaningful conversations, modeling language, and explicit word teaching. Evidence support the use of these strategies produce positive outcomes for children's oral language and development during playtime (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; de Rivera et al., 2005; Dickinson, Darrow, & Tinabu, 2008; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Kontos, 1999; Massey et al., 2008; Meacham et al., 2014; Tompkins et al., 2013). Therefore, these strategies were intended to help teachers extend and provide meaningful conversations during playtime with the children in their classrooms.

The last PD session consisted of synthesizing the content of the previous PD workshop sessions. We discussed the obstacles that prevented us from having meaningful conversations with the children in our classrooms. Together we addressed the ways to overcome these

challenges and what we need to ensure that oral language and vocabulary development are taking place during playtime.

      Pedagogies. To help teachers engage with the differing teaching strategies and extend their understanding of children's oral language and vocabulary development, I used several key pedagogies in the workshops. These pedagogies were drawn from research on professional development (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; National Research Council, 2011; National School Reform Faculty, 2012; Silberman, 2006) and sought to provide each teacher participant with opportunities to acquire the knowledge through active participation. These pedagogies included protocols, shared readings, quick writes, and visual examples of exemplary teaching.

      Shared reading. This was an activity given to the teacher participants prior to the PD workshop session. They were asked to read a specific document and be prepared to discuss what they read when we met. By reading the same article and discussing the content using a protocol, my hope was that teachers would gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the importance of play and its relationship to oral language and vocabulary development. I also wanted the participants to understand why the strategies we were learning about were important to developing these skills in preschool children. I gave the teacher participants two shared readings, prior to the first and fifth sessions of the PD initiative. For the first session, the teachers were asked to read an article entitled, "Building Language & Literacy through Play" (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). I chose this article because I wanted the teacher participants to have a better understanding of how children learn language and literacy through play. I also wanted the teacher participants to learn more about the ways in which they could increase the play opportunities for the children in their own classrooms.

The fifth session reading was "Teacher-Child Conversations in the Preschool Classroom" by Susan Massey (2004). Again, we used the 4A's protocol (School Reform Initiative, A Community of Learners, 2015), which is described in Figure 3. Massey's research focuses on the teacher's role in conversations with children and the importance of meaningful conversations. The intent of having teachers read this research was to give them ideas to the support the ways and times in their schedule when they can provide cognitively challenging questions (Massey, 2004). The teacher-child relationship is more predictive of language and literacy development (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002), however, teachers need to plan for these interactions throughout the day (Massey, 2004). This was the most controversial activity, resulting in the most discussion and eliciting the strongest reactions from the teacher participants of the PD intervention. The teachers were insulted by the finding that cognitively challenging talk is somewhat infrequent and 70% of teachers do not have meaningful conversations with the children in their classrooms (Massey, 2004). This reading was used to provoke the teacher participants' thinking. I was hoping the details of the research would provide the catalyst for having meaningful conversations and challenge each teacher participant to think about what they do in their own classrooms. The Massey (2004) article shared how important it was for the adult to be stationary during playtime. Kristen disagreed and discussed the ways she moves around her classroom making sure she is available when someone needs help. The only time she is stationary is when she is with the children completing the project or craft activity. She questioned, "Does being stationary really work?" The conversation continued as follows:

> Faith: On the first page the author assumed that cognitively challenging talk is lacking and somewhat infrequent.

> Valerie: They are assuming that all preschools have limited talk, not small ones that do things differently like ours. Maybe this kind of conversation doesn't happen at the rate they felt it should.

Kristen: There were a lot of things that don't happen.

Valerie: Are they basing this on a full day program? We do a lot more than we think we do.

Facilitator: What do you agree with?

Facilitator: Not all questions need to be higher order questions.

Kristen: I agree about not using higher order questions all the time. It gives everyone a chance to respond, since not all children can answer the higher-level questions.

Valerie: Initially, in the beginning of the year, you need to give them the opportunity to be successful. As the year goes on you can ask higher order questions.

Faith: I agree with what you all said. You also need to have children build trust to talk.

Facilitator: What do you want to argue with?

Facilitator: I believe what teachers do is important, and that more research is needed.

Kristen: Being stationary like in the kitchen area, you should enter and exit in order for play to happen. You just can't sit there the entire playtime.

Valerie: We do spend some time being stationary, like when we are in small groups.

Faith: Children have few opportunities to elaborate on teachers' questions.

 Valerie: No mention of opportunities for oral language and vocabulary learning in math and science, just during literacy.

Faith: During the Steam lesson I noticed a great deal of language that was being used.

Facilitator: What would you like to aspire to?

Valerie: To be more intentional in our conversations.

Faith: I want to sit with the children at snack time so the children don't have to shout and they really want to talk. I feel like the children don't know how to talk with each other.

Kristen: Sharing things like we do at circle time. It sparks conversation.

Using a protocol for our discussion allowed time for everyone to share their thoughts and ideas about the article. The discussion was focused on the assumptions, what they agreed with and argued with as well as what they wanted to aspire to in the article we read. The teacher participants had much of the same ideas and thoughts, however they had different opinions about what they would argue with after reading the article; Kristen argued that the article mentioned teachers should be stationary during playtime. Faith argued that children need to have many opportunities to elaborate on the teachers' questions and the article provided evidence that children have few opportunities to elaborate on the teachers' questions (Massey, 2004) and Valerie shared her opinion about the fact there was no mention of opportunities for oral language and vocabulary learning in math and science, just during literacy.

While shared readings acted as a catalyst for teacher reflection about children's oral language learning, my role as facilitator potentially limited helping the participants to make connections between the readings and how they might use play as a space for oral language and vocabulary enhancement. For example, additional probing during the workshop protocol above might have identified what the teacher participants thought was different from our program and the one they were reading about. As the facilitator I could have asked each of the teacher participants after Valerie's comment about wanting to be more intentional in conversations, "How could they be more intentional in their conversations with children during play?" Also after Kristen's comment about sparking conversations, I could have asked, "How does sharing at circle time spark conversation and how might you use similar techniques during play time?" As facilitator, I used the shared readings to support teacher investigation of oral language and vocabulary but I did not push the teachers to explore their questions in relation to children's play.

Protocols. Protocols are structured guidelines that promote meaningful learning for a

group of individuals with shared values (National School Reform Faculty, 2012). Using

protocols helps to get a variety of different perspectives in a short period of time. Three different

types of protocols were used in the PD workshop sessions with the aim of facilitating the

exploration of each teacher participant's understanding of the content we were discussing. Two

protocols were used during the PD workshop sessions and one was used during the reflection

sessions. Each protocol served a different purpose and aimed to achieve different results.

The Four "A" s Text Protocol (School Reform Initiative of Community of Learners,

2005), see Figure 3 was used to explore the contents of the research articles more deeply while

taking into consideration each participant's own values and intentions in two of the six sessions

(School Reform Initiative of Community of Learners, 2005). Using a protocol such as this

provided a framework for the teacher participants to use to guide their reading and reflected on

each article. Following the protocol also ensured that each teacher participant was given an

opportunity to share her thoughts with the group.

SRI School Reform Initiative

    A Community of Learners

Four "A" s Text Protocol

Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, Washington 2005

Purpose

To explore a text deeply in light of one's own values and intentions

Roles

Facilitator/timekeeper (who participates); participants

Time

Five minutes total for each participant, plus 10 minutes for the final 2 steps

Process

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on sticky notes in answer to the following 4 questions (you can also add your own "A"s.
   - What **Assumptions** does the author of the text hold?
   - What do you **Agree** with in the text?
   - What do you want to **Argue** with in the text?
   - What parts of the text do you want to **Aspire** to (or **Act** upon)?
2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.
3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining "A" s, taking them one at a time. What do people agree with, argue with, and aspire to (or act upon) in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one "A" to the next, giving each "A" enough time for full explorations.
4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: what does this mean for our work with students?
5. **Debrief the text experience.**

Figure 3. Four A's Text Protocol. (School Reform Initiative of Community of Learners, 2005)

One example of the use of this protocol was during a discussion of an article entitled, "Building Language and Literacy through Play" (Bodrova & Leong, 2003) during the first PD workshop session. The 4A's protocol (School Reform Initiative, A Community of Learners, 2015) was used to discuss the assumptions put forth by the authors. These assumptions were about the questions teachers have about teaching preschoolers appropriately with the increase in academic pressures. The protocol was also used to elicit teacher responses as to what was agreeable, and what the teachers wanted to aspire to, or act upon, based on their understanding of the article. I also used this protocol in the fifth PD workshop during our discussion of the article by Susan Massey (2004), "Teacher-Child Conversations in the Preschool Classroom."

Another protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National School Reform Faculty, 2015) see Figure 4 was used during the last PD workshop session. This protocol allows the teacher participants to identify any new understanding they gained during this PD intervention and what made it so meaningful. This

protocol also gave teachers the opportunity to reflect on how this new understanding could be used in their classroom practices and what led them to this new level of understanding of this topic.

National School Reform Faculty

Harmony Education Center, www.nsrflharmony.org

<div align="center">

The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

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Purpose of this protocol: To analyze how a new understanding has developed and the factors that helped the understanding to develop.

Roles: A timekeeper/facilitator to help the group stay focused on how the new understanding described by the presenter was developed.

"Understanding" is defined as being able to use what you know flexibly in unfamiliar situations or to address new problems.

1. **Identifying an understanding** (10 minutes)
   Reflect on and then write a short description of one new understanding that you have developed or deepened this week. **Note what processes, experiences, and performances led to that understanding.** Think about these questions: What about the process took me well beyond what I already knew? What confusions emerged and how did I overcome them? Was the experience different from other learning experiences I've had---and if so, how?

2. **Presenter describes the understanding** (3 minutes)
   In groups of 3, the first person shares his or her "new level of understanding" and the process that made it so meaningful.

3. **Group asks clarifying questions** (3 minutes)
   The rest of the group asks clarifying questions about the details of the process that led to the development or deepening of that understanding.

4. **Group reflects on the process of understanding** (3 minutes)
   The group discusses what they heard the presenter describing. Think about: What was interesting to you about the process the presenter described? What helped the presenter well beyond what he/she already knew? What probing questions might you want to pose to the presenter?
   (Note: Presenter does not participate in this part of the discussion)

5. **Presenter responds** (1 minute)
   The presenter responds (any way he or she likes—but briefly!) to the group's discussion of what made this learning experience so meaningful. (Note: Presenter does not have to respond to questions raised in step 4.)

6. **Protocol begins again for next group member** (10 min. for each member)
   Repeat steps 2 through 5 for each member of the group. Remember to keep the focus on the process that helped to develop the understanding (as opposed to the understanding itself).

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7. **Taking the understanding home** (10 minutes)
   As a group, talk about the strategies you can use to continue to nurture the development of these understandings once you've gone back to your setting.
8. **Appreciate!**
   Take a moment to appreciate and celebrate the new understandings you and your group have developed.
9. **Debrief** (5 minutes)
   Debrief the protocol as a whole group. Possible questions: what worked well? How might we apply what we learned to other work? What misconceptions or confusion emerged? How might students use this process to reflect on their work/ What adaptations to this protocol might improve the process?

Figure 4. The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis. (National School Reform Faculty, 2015)

As we began our discussion using this protocol the teacher participants' reflections included the challenges they faced and ways to overcome these challenges. All three teachers identified the lack of time to have meaningful conversations with the children as a challenge.

Kristen: The behavior of the other children needs to be addressed. If you are trying to have a conversation with a child and you need to stop and fix a behavior or a child might need help with the bathroom, it cuts the conversation short and by the time you go back to the child, they lose their train of thought.

Valerie: Classmates often interrupt the conversations. It could be a behavior issue, shoes that need tying or they just want to talk to you and they can't wait.

Faith: Some children have limited social skills. They don't know how to have conversations. I wonder if they even have conversations with their parents.

Kristen: There are so many activities that need to be completed. We can't talk to the children because we have to get things done with them, like for Mother's Day, getting the gifts for the moms ready was time consuming and stressful. Many craft activities completed during playtime require the teacher's direction and take time away from the opportunities for teachers to have meaningful conversations with children.

This discussion helped provide an understanding of why these teacher participants felt they were not able to have meaningful conversations with the children during playtime. Each of the teacher participants had challenges that prevented them from having meaningful

conversations with the children in their classes. Kristen and Valerie described children's behavior as a challenge and Kristen was also challenged with completing craft activities with the children. Faith felt the challenges had more to do with the limited social skills of the children. No matter what the reason there was something from preventing these conversations from taking place and the teacher participants were able to identify those challenges.

Thus, the protocols were tools that gave all teachers the opportunity to contribute to the conversation, guided teacher reflection, and established a better understanding of the concepts being explored in the professional development. However, some of the protocols used, such as "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National School Reform Faulty, 2015) were more effective than other protocols in clarifying and understanding what each teacher participant thought about a topic.

Quick writes. A "quick write" is a prompt for self-reflection and is used to first draw participants into the subject matter and create an immediate learning involvement (Silberman, 2006). "Quick writes" were used to bring the teacher participants' personal stories into the conversations to help connect the theory we were discussing to practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Two "quick write" activities were used during this PD initiative. The first PD session "quick write" was used as an opening activity to help the teacher participants begin to think about our topic of literacy and relate it to their own personal experiences of learning to read and write. The "quick write" activity was also used during the second session (see Table 5). The teachers completed a worksheet with questions related to play and when the teacher participants were children.

Table 5

"Quick Writes" Prompts

PD Workshop Session	Prompt
Session One	Please take a few minutes to write about your memory of learning to read and write.
Session Two	Answer the following questions: How did you play when you were young? Where did you play?

One example of a "quick write" response from Valerie during session two was that she remembers putting on plays with the other children in her neighborhood. She said, "Everyone had a part and needed to act them out. I loved being a child. It was fun to remember what it was like to play when I was younger." This comment from Valerie showed that the "quick write" elicited the type of response that I was hoping for, remembering what it was like to play when they were young.

Visual examples of exemplary teaching. Visual examples of exemplary teaching were used to give the teacher participants a model of teaching strategies that were introduced in the PD workshop sessions. Each visual aid was a practical and relevant example that helped adult learners to be more engaged (Silberman, 2006). Each of the teacher participants were able to see or think about an example of something other than their own classrooms. Specifically, I used two types of visual examples: videos and a scripted scenario.

Videos are effective because they provide the participants with an authentic model of effective teaching related to the topic of discussion. In the first session, which was about the importance of play and establishing a literacy rich environment, I showed a video

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpv-VgJ8Cns) with an example of a dramatic play center set

up as a café to give examples of the types of appropriate props and materials that could be used

to enhance literacy. There was a discussion of what was seen in the video compared to what

each teacher's classroom environment looked like.

> Valerie: The teacher had a nice setup. There were labels that provided print in
> meaningful ways for children. There was furniture that was child-sized and props and
> materials to encourage language and literacy.

> Kristen: There was a lot of writing that was evident in the classroom in the video and the
> children's writing was also displayed. I can't do that in my classroom. Children are not
> always interested in writing.

> Faith: The room was large and the teacher in the video seemed to have plenty of time to
> set up the environment.

As can be seen in the conversation above, all three teacher participants talked about the

classroom environment, however, there was no discussion about the connections between how

these props and materials would encourage language and literacy while the children were

playing. Here, I could have stepped in and asked "How could the materials and the classroom

environment enhance the literacy skills for the children?" Such a question might have provided

concrete ways for the teacher participants to start to think about how to enhance literacy in their

own classrooms.

After the discussion about the first video the teachers watched another video called

"Hand, Heart and Mind"

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwMjvPP6JNQ&feature=player_detailpage). The first part

of this video showed a group of teachers working alone creating a structure using only one type

of material. The second part showed a group of teachers working together using a variety of

materials. Seeing teachers actually working with others and using a variety of materials gave the

teacher participants a better understanding of how this supports oral language development. Once the video showed the teachers working together there were more conversations and creativity.

Videos were also used during the fourth session. These videos focused on meaningful conversation strategies such as building opportunities to talk with children, modeling conversations and using complex language and vocabulary. Each of the videos showed teachers using these strategies successfully with children. This gave the teacher participants the opportunity to actually see each strategy in action.

In addition to videos, I also employed scripted scenarios taken from real classrooms to help the participants visualize how teachers can use play for the intentional teaching of literacy. Several scenarios were used in session three to help the participants think about what they would be able to do in each of the examples. For example, the following scenario from "Teaching Strategies" (2004), (see figure 5) was used to get the participants thinking about their role in children's play.

> *Rosemary teaches 3 and 4-year-old children in a preschool. Over time, she observes that although the children begin each day eager to play in the pretend grocery store, they do not seem to know what to do with the materials or each other. They mostly argue over the cash register, grab the food cartons from the shelves, and dump them onto the floor. Their play lacks focus, and they seldom talk to one another for real or in a pretend role. It does not take long before the area is a mess and the children simply drift away to other activities. Rosemary wants to introduce the children to other possibilities and help them play at a higher level. I asked the teachers, what could Rosemary do? What can the children learn in the pretend grocery store with the appropriate support?*   ("Teaching Strategies," 2004)

Figure 5. Teaching Strategies (2004) scenario and questions.

This scenario sparked a great deal of discussion:

Facilitator: I hope everyone had the opportunity to read and think about the questions. Let's start by answering the questions asked in the scenario.

Valerie: I would add more cookbooks; they might have a café in the grocery store. I would add baskets or brown bags and pretend to be a check out person. The children could make lists, and they could put the groceries in the basket or bag and pay before they leave the store. Perhaps they could discuss the appropriate roles first and have children apply for the jobs in the store.

Kristen: I had bags in my classroom and the children just put everything in them.

Valerie: I would have the children making food. Everyone could have a turn being the cashier and then switch roles. We could have a store with the specials of the day with the things the children like.

Faith: I would always have coffee.

Valerie: I would add a poster to the wall with pictures and words to help them write the words. I would start with snack boxes, and label where things should go.

Faith: The posters should be at eye level.

Kristen: Yes, but you have to do the best with the room you have. You might want to change it into a lemonade stand, ice cream or a bakery. The children could make the sign and then change it into the other places and they could put the sign up each day depending on the children's decision, and then they could take the roles for what is needed.

Although the conversations of the three teacher participants continued to relate to the props and materials needed to enhance the oral language and vocabulary development, the scenario had at least inspired them to talk about the intersections of literacy and play. The videos and classroom scenarios provided real examples of what teachers can do to enhance the oral language and vocabulary development through in their classrooms.

Across the six professional development workshops I combined these various pedagogies -- shared readings, protocols, quick writes, and visual examples-- to help the participants explore

the content in ways that could get them thinking about their own practice. However, teacher

learning is more effective when adults are given the opportunity to try out ideas in their own

classroom contexts. Therefore, at the end of each PD workshop session, the teacher participants

were given an assignment that asked them to try out what we had been discussing in the

workshops. The reflective sessions that followed each PD workshop provided the space in

which teachers could share the results of their inquiries.

Reflection Sessions

The reflection sessions were held in the same room as our PD workshop sessions.

Lunch was provided and the sessions lasted about an hour each. Each of the six reflection

sessions consisted of a different discussion related to the previous PD workshop. Table 6

summarizes the topics addressed during each reflection session.

Table 6

Reflection Sessions

PD Workshop and Focus	Reflective Assignment	Reflective Session
PD Workshop 1-April 6: The Importance of Play and Establishing a Literacy Rich Environment	Identify strengths and improvements for classrooms and interest area	Reflection session 1 – April 13: Protocol, "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Workshop 2- April 20 AM: The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development	Identify the conversations happening during the indoor and outdoor playtime	Reflection session 2 – April 27: Protocol, "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Workshop 3 – April 20 PM: The Teacher's Role in Oral Language Development through Play	Identify the roles of the teachers and assistants during indoor and outdoor play	Reflection session 3 – April 27: Protocol, "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Workshop 4 – May 4: Extended and Meaningful	Identify how teachers and assistants built opportunities	Reflection session 4 – May 11: Protocol, "Atlas,

Conversations during Playtime	to talk, model conversations and use complex language during indoor and outdoor playtime	Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Workshop 5 – May 18: Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime-Continued	Identify examples of active listening and reciprocal exchanges and the use of higher order questions and expanding on children's words and ideas.	Reflection session 5 – May 25: Protocol, "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)
PD Workshop 6 – June 1: Putting it All Together	Integrate meaningful conversations to promote vocabulary and oral language in each teacher's classroom during playtime	Reflection Session 6 – June 8: Protocol, "Atlas, Looking at Data" (National Reform Faculty, 2012)

To facilitate rich conversation among the teachers, I employed the protocol "Atlas Looking at Data" (National School Reform Faculty, 2012), (see Figure 6), during each of our reflection sessions. This protocol was used so that each teacher participant could share what he or she saw or experienced without judgment or interpretation.

National School Reform Faculty

Harmony Education Center, www.nsrflharmony.org

Atlas, Looking at Data

Learning from Data is a tool to guide groups of teachers discovering what students, educators, and the public understands and how they are thinking. The tool developed by Eric Buchovecky is based in part on the work of the Leadership for Urban Mathematics Project and of the Assessment Communities of Teachers Project. The tool also draws on the work of Steve Seideland Evangeline Harris-Stefanakis of Project Zero at Harvard University, Revised November 2000 by Gene Thompson-Grove for NSRF. Revised August 2004 for Looking at Data by Dianne Leahy.

Selecting Data to Share

Data is the centerpiece of the group discussion. The following guidelines can help in selecting data or artifacts that will promote the most interesting and productive group discussions. Data or artifacts that do not lead to a single conclusion generally lead to rich conversations.

Sharing and Discussion of Data

Discussions of some forms of data sometimes make people feel "on the spot" or exposed, either for themselves, for their students or for their profession. The use of a structured dialogue format provides an effective technique for managing the discussion and maintaining its focus.

A structured dialogue format is a way of organizing a group conversation by clearly defining who should be talking when and about what. While at first it may seem rigid and artificial, a clearly defined structure frees the group to focus its attention on what is most important. In general, structured dialogue formats allot specified times for the group to discuss various aspects of the work.

1. **Getting Started**
   o The facilitator reminds the group of the norms.
     Note: Each of the next four steps should be about 10 minutes in length. It is sometimes helpful for the facilitator to take notes.
   o The educator providing the data set gives a very brief statement of the data and avoids explaining what s/he concludes about the data if the data belongs to the group rather than the presenter.

2. **Describing the Data**
   o The facilitator asks: "What do you see?"
   o During this period the group gathers as much information as possible form the data.
   o Group members describe what they see in data, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations. It is helpful to identify where the observation is being made—e.g., "On page one in the second column, third row…."
   o If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
   o It may be useful to list the group's observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

Interpreting the Data (10 Minutes)

   o The facilitator asks: "What does the data suggest?" Second question: "What are the assumptions we make about students and their learning?"
   o During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the data says and why. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.
   o From the evidence gathered in the preceding sections, try to infer: what is being worked on and why?
   o Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the data, no matter how confusing, makes sense to some people; your job is to see what they may see.
   o As you listen to each other's interpretations ask questions that help you better understand each other's perspectives.

Implications for Classroom Practice (10 Minutes)

   o The facilitator asks: "What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?" This question may be modified, depending on the data.
   o Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss any implications of this work might have for teaching and assessment in the classroom. In particular, consider the following questions:

     -What steps could be taken next?

-What strategies might be most effective?

-What else would you like to see happen? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?

-What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?

-What are the implications for equity?

5. Reflecting on the Atlas-Looking at Data (10 Minutes)

Presenter Reflection:

- o   What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- o   What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- o   How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?

Group Reflection:

- o   What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at the data raise for you?
- o   Did questions of equity arise?
- o   How can you pursue these questions further?
- o   Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at this data?
6. **Debrief the Process**
- o   How well did the process work?
- o   What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things?
- o   What could be improved?

Figure 6. Atlas, Looking at Data (National School Reform Faculty, 2012).

Giving teachers the opportunity to apply what is learned in their own classrooms, as well as an opportunity to have conversations about their own teaching practice, engages teachers in thinking about what they might do differently (Fullan, 2007; Wood, 2007). As can be seen in the conversation below, the reflection sessions gave the participants an opportunity to take the knowledge we explored in each workshop and apply it to their own teaching contexts. In the following vignette the teacher participants were asked to identify literacy strengths and improvements in each of the three classrooms. The teacher participants had an opportunity to visit their colleagues' classrooms while each of the teacher participants' class was in music, which gave each teacher an additional twenty minutes to complete the assignment.

After the morning session, the teacher participants staggered into our meeting room. Valerie was always the first to arrive, followed by Faith, then Kristen. It was just about 11:50 am and we were finally ready to begin our time together.

Facilitator: I handed out the protocol and then asked "What did you see regarding literacy when you visited the classrooms?"

Faith: Having a different set of eyes helped to see things that others might not see.

Kristen: I thought all the classrooms had literacy rich environments. I saw a lot of vocabulary all over and in all the classrooms I saw a clipboard and writing utensils.

Facilitator: Valerie, would you like to share what you saw.

Valerie: I saw lots of kids' work. The bulletin boards had pictures that included words. Even in the kitchen area there were books and pictures with words. I saw calendars and children's names in all the rooms. Everyone had a library area. There were colors and words and alphabet. The play area had pictures with words. The art carts were filled with materials and science areas were identified as such.

Facilitator: Faith

Faith: Labels were evident and at eye level. There were words and pictures in all the rooms. Kristen's room had books that the children made. There were posters, letters, chalkboards and sign in books in the classrooms. There were a lot of puzzles and chalkboards for children to write on.

Facilitator: We are going to now interpret the data. I then asked, "What does the data suggest?" What are the assumptions we make about students and their learning?"

Kristen: We do have a very rich literacy environment. Children see words daily without even having a lesson. They have a chance to write all day and they are always learning through play. You might have a set project where they are learning. They are lucky to be here and so much around them and have fun. Whatever level there is something for them.

Facilitator: Valerie, I will be asking you to go next and would like a different interpretation of the data.

Valerie: I'm thinking all of those things are why we do what we do. I agree having the children's work in the classroom gives them a sense of belonging. If they mention

something of interest, we bring in a book or something that they are interested in. What is always in the room can be changed to be familiar but different. We might change up the kitchen area to make it exciting for the children.

Faith: My first thought was to look and see that we have a lot of the same things. We have consistency with materials in the classrooms.

Facilitator: Someone mentioned books in the library, but did you see books in the other areas of the classrooms?

Kristen: I did see books in the other classrooms; however, we don't have them in any other area than the library in my classroom. We did have them in the block area; however, the children didn't use them so they got ripped up with the blocks. Maybe the children weren't interested or ready for them. Maybe the kitchen would be a good area.

Facilitator: They could be on display.

Faith: I do have a cookbook in the kitchen area.

Facilitator: We talked about having a lot of literacy in our rooms, having labels at eye level, and that children's writing is important. It doesn't have to look like how you would write it. There should be literacy in every area of the classroom. What are the implications for your classrooms?

Kristen: I don't have books in my kitchen and block area so that is something I would like to add.

Facilitator: The books could always be in a little basket for the children to use in all the areas.

Kristen: That would be something I would add. We have so many bulletin boards in our classrooms and it's harder to keep everything at eye level, however, children do look around the room.

Faith: They like recognizing each other's names. They know who is here and where they sit.

Valerie: The children write their names on everything, but sometimes it's on the back of the project and the parents can't see it. It's always good to remind the children about upper and lower case letters. One implication after talking and observing, I have books

in the different areas, but need to change it up. I need to include clipboards and writing utensils so the children can record their observations.

Faith: I need to add books in all the areas. I get caught up with what the parents want to see. I would like the children to write the captions like we saw in the PowerPoint last week.

Kristen: We need to do a lot more encouraging for them to write and draw. They feel they need to be perfect and they can't be.

Facilitator: This was great. We don't always have a chance to talk. Did you find anything interesting or surprising?

Faith: I found it interesting that we really have so many literacy things. I didn't realize it until I focused on it.

Valerie: We have similar materials but the children may use it differently. It's nice to sit and talk with each other. Thank you.

Using the protocol and asking teachers to describe what they saw in one another's classrooms got them thinking about what they might do differently. Faith, for example, says, "I found it interesting that we really have so many literacy things. I didn't realize it until I focused on it." Although there was little mention of books. Kristen mentioned, "We need to do a lot more encouraging for the children to write and draw," and Valerie commented, "What is always in the room can be changed to be familiar but different. We might change up the kitchen area to make it exciting for the children." Each of the teacher participants identified things that they would be able to change in their own classrooms to provide children with a literacy-rich classroom environment.

Each of the PD reflection sessions followed a similar agenda. One of the more informative reflection sessions occurred during a discussion regarding sessions four and five where the focus was on strategies the teacher participants could use to extend meaningful conversations with, and between, children during playtime. The assignment for reflection

session four was for the teachers to identify how the teachers and assistants built opportunities to

talk, model conversations, and use complex language during indoor and outdoor playtime.

I decided to take each of the strategies we were discussing separately, beginning with

building opportunities to talk. Valerie began the conversation:

> One of the children brought in a transformer car and I asked how do you change the car?
> The child showed how that worked and explained what was happening as he did. I said,
> when toys change we might say it…(left time for the answer), I was going for the word
> transform. I then introduced the word transformer and asked if we had any in our
> classroom. The children said yes, the "alphabots."   I was pleased that they said the word
> and were able to identify another transformer in the classroom.

> Valerie commented that building opportunities to talk was related to vocabulary and in
> another example I used comparing and contrasting two books, one fiction and one non-
> fiction. The books, The Very Hungry Caterpillar and The Butterfly is Born was used to
> discuss the words metamorphosis and proboscis.

> Faith had less to say on this subject, however, she also used questions to build
> opportunities to talk. She said, "during free art or play dough, I'll ask them what they are
> doing, talk about comparing size, shape and color. This past week while playing with
> play dough, I said to a child, "yours is bumpy and yellow. Mine is flat and green." In this
> example the teacher provides children with the words that compares and contrasts the
> play dough, however, the comment Faith made provides no indication that the children
> continued the conversation.

Thus during each of the reflection sessions the teacher participants shared the details of what was

happening or not happening in their classroom practices.

In summary, as the facilitator, my hope was that the information shared in the workshops

and explored through the assignments and reflective sessions would provide these teacher

participants with the knowledge and support to implement literacy learning during playtime. The

protocols and pedagogies provided each of the teacher participants a chance to contribute to the

conversation, however, by using protocols as written and accepting teacher responses to shared

readings. I missed opportunities to have a deeper understanding of the teacher participants beliefs

and practices. In the next chapter I take the reader into the classrooms of Kristen, Valerie, and

Faith and show how they used or did not use playtime for teaching oral language and vocabulary.

Chapter 5: Individual Case Studies of Three Teacher Participants

My intent in implementing this professional development (PD) intervention was to help three teachers use playtime as a time for children to learn vocabulary and oral language. What I found was that each of the three teachers responded differently to the PD. In what follows I present mini case studies of each of the three teachers who participated in this professional development initiative. Within each case I will address my third research question, "What are the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play and their oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after a PD intervention?"   In answering this question, I also examine how each teacher participated in, and responded to, the PD.

Kristen: The Resister to Change

"Keep Doing What I am Doing"

At the time of this study, Kristen was an experienced teacher who had been working at Caring Partners Nursery School (CPNS) for fifteen years. As the director of this preschool, I have typically found Kristen to be somewhat inflexible, unwilling to change, and closed off to new ideas. When faced with initiatives, such as GROW NJ Kids, she is the last to accept changes and the first to argue why an initiative will not work for CPNS. Similarly, within her classroom, she is inflexible about making changes to her routines to accommodate the individual needs of a child or adjusting her outside playtime to meet the needs of all of the teachers.

Change does not come easily to Kristen. For example, every year, Kristen, like all teachers at CPNS, is asked to record her accomplishments and set goals. When setting her long-range goal in April 2016 she said that she aimed to, "keep doing what I am doing." Perhaps, not surprisingly, Kristen does not have any desire to engage in professional development outside of that which is offered at CPNS. She feels that the education she received and the fact that she has been grandfathered into a P-3 certification is enough to be able to teach preschoolers using best

practices that are developmentally appropriate and provide her students with what they need to learn.

Kristen's lack of openness to change was evident throughout the professional development. In what follows, I try to show how Kristen's lack of openness and her sense of confidence in her own teaching shaped her participation in the PD initiative. I begin by giving the reader a sense of Kristen as a teacher, her beliefs and practices about pre-k education and language and literacy, as well as what she believes about the contribution of play to literacy. I will also describe Kristen's engagement and participation in the PD initiative. I will then take the reader into Kristen's classroom and describe her practices during and after the PD.

Beliefs and Practices Before the Professional Development Initiative

For Kristen, pre-K is a social time, "It is when they learn to interact with other children and teachers. They learn school behavior. You know, as far as lining up and sharing and following directions, transitions." But for Kristen, pre-K is also a time when children develop key pre-literacy skills including oral language development. Kristen said, "It is about their speech and some children have to learn to speak in sentences." She believes that children also need to listen to be able to speak better. Children need opportunities to listen to other children and teachers' conversations in order for them to learn vocabulary and provide appropriate responses to comments and questions.

According to Kristen, language learning for children is a natural phenomenon. She believes that children are born with an innate ability to learn vocabulary and oral language skills. As she reported, "Children at this age pick up vocabulary really quickly. They are 'word sponges,' so it's important to expose them to new words, but they need to be words they are interested in." During her interview, she indicated that, "Children expand their vocabulary

immensely from their peers." Kristen also saw value in speaking and listening opportunities in the classroom. In her words:
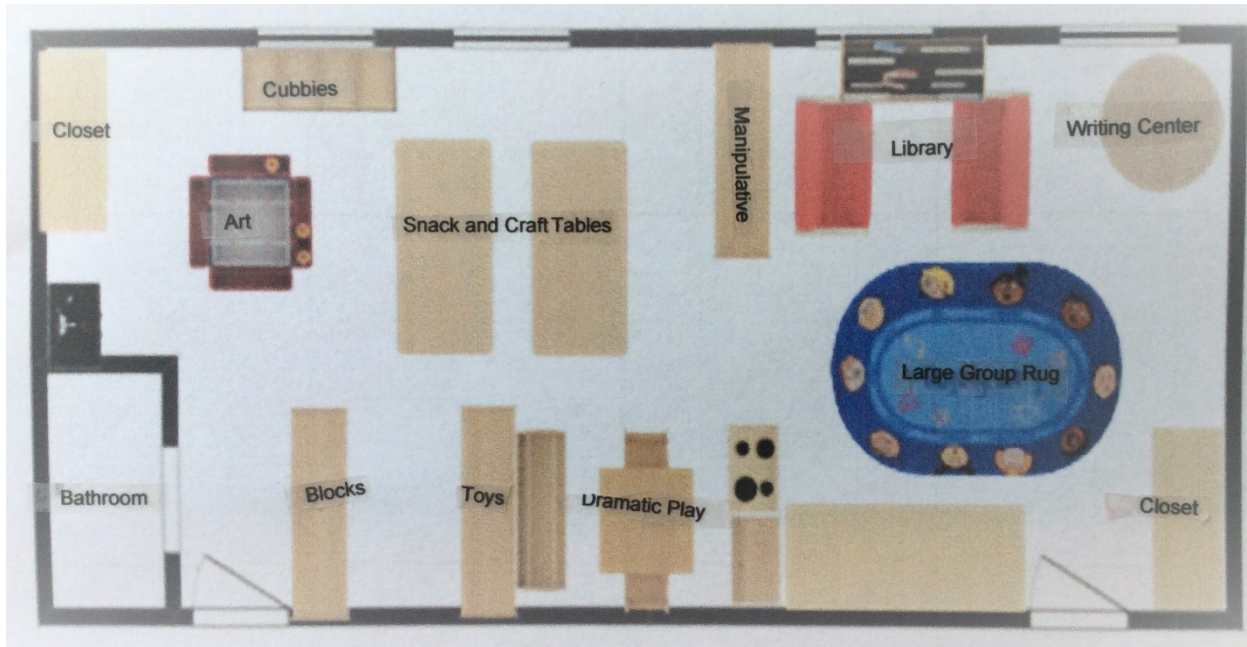
> They speak when we do things all together. When a child uses a new word, I make sure they know what it means, sharing it with the class. I also ask them questions to get them to speak. At circle time, I ask the children an individual question so they get to speak and hear each other speaking and that triggers ideas that the children have.

Welcome time is another time when children have the opportunity to talk. In the first interview with Kristen, she talked about welcome time in her classroom. Kristen described it as follows:

> It's a good time for us to sit with them one on one and ask them what they did yesterday, or what they had for breakfast. It gives the quiet children a chance to talk, so I can assess and see if I can understand them. I want to see if they could ask for help if they need it or if they can tell you they need to go to the bathroom.

Kristen used these instructional moments when children were speaking to assess their oral language development. In doing so she reported that she was able to identify from the beginning of the year which children have a great vocabulary and which children she needs to watch and talk to more because they are shy or less talkative. She said, "I try to do more one on one with these children and find what they like to do. Some like to color, and then I could ask them to tell me about their picture."

For Kristen, teaching is something that takes place during a teacher led instructional event, while play is more of a child-centered activity. She said that as a teacher, "I don't want to control the play. I like for the children to be in control." Kristen's classroom environment reflected her focus on teaching. The play areas of the classroom (see figure 7) are relatively small compared to the teacher-directed activity areas, the large group rug and the craft activity tables.

https://kaplan.roomstyler.com/rooms/17823658/kristens-classroom

Figure 7. Kristen's classroom environment prior to the PD intervention.

Research supports having a physical environment that is enriched with props and materials to enhance speaking, reading and writing. This type of literacy enriched environment includes a dramatic play area, environmental print, children's writing and books of various genre and diversity (Morrow, 1990; Morrow, Tracey & Del Nero, 2011; Neumann, Hood, Ford & Neumann, 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Petrakos & Howe, 1996; Vukelich, 1994). Kristen's classroom included a writing center, library, and a dramatic play area, however, the literacy enhancements in these areas were very limited, if any at all. The writing center (figure 8) consisted of a table, chair and some paper. Mostly pictures with no examples of child writing or words that relate to the pictures were displayed.

Figure 8. Kristen's writing center.

The library (see figure 9) had two small couches and books displayed on a bookshelf.

The books on the shelf consisted of some picture books, with limited diversity. However, there

were books that were related to the theme, which at this time was about pets. The amount of

books were few for the amount of children in the class. The bulletin board above the area had

some pictures with no corresponding words evident to provide written models for the children.

Figure 9. Kristen's library area.

A literacy enriched classroom should consist of a dramatic play area (Morrow, 1990;

Morrow, Tracey & Del Nero, 2001). Kristen's classroom did have a dramatic play area (see

figure 10), however, the literacy included was very limited. The bulletin board in the dramatic

play area showed very few words. There was a cash register and clipboard on the table; however,

no books were evident anywhere in this area.

Figure 10. Kristen's dramatic play area.

This lack of literacy rich materials in the environment, was reflected in the consistently

low – midrange scores (2's – 3's) Kristen received on the initial Supports for Early Literacy

Assessment (SELA) (Smith et al., 2001). The SELA measures the quality of the literacy

environment on a Likert scale from one to five with one representing low quality and five

representing the presence of high quality supports for young children's language and literacy

development (Smith et al., 2001). These scores indicated that the library area consisted of two

small sofas, no carpet, and lacked coziness. The scores also indicated the lack of a variety of

books from different genres and any multicultural literature that introduce children to a variety of

cultures. Kristen also scored low by not having books in any area of the classroom other than the

library. The score for props and materials was low indicating an insufficient amount to enhance

literacy development. There were limited writing opportunities in any area of the classroom and

Kristen did not promote writing as evidenced by the SELA scores.

For Kristen, play is a learning opportunity for preschoolers when they are completing a project that goes along with the lesson or activity of the day. According to Kristen, "children can move around the classroom freely, but there is always a project I like them to complete so they learn something." She further elaborated:

> I usually have a project that I would like the children to complete. Occasionally, I do a whole class project, but most of the time it is one table of six children. When they are done, they rotate out and when the children finish playing they come over, and there is always one that doesn't come to the table.

In the first interview, Kristen also said that during playtime she rotates around the room but feels that her responsibility is mostly to oversee the project the children are completing. She explained:

> I am not controlling the activity. I want to ensure the children are following the directions, but I let them work independently. I always explain the craft ahead of time. I'm at the craft table and the dramatic play and kitchen areas are close by so I could always go back and forth. I don't sit much. I try to find a good transition for children to come to complete their craft activity when they are playing.

This art project was Kristen's priority and left little time for her to interact with children in other centers as shown in the following observation:

> *Playtime is just about to start. Kristen is telling the children what they are going to do during playtime. "We will make a beautiful picture frame for our Mommies, we'll use dot markers, like this, dot, dot, dot so it doesn't get drippy." Showing the children an example of one she did she says, "This is one I started and it's all green. Do you have to do one color? You could do any color you like, even rainbow colors. Today we just want to use the dot markers and we'll let them dry when you are sleeping. Raise your hand if you want to start with your present for your Mommy." Kristen assigns each child an activity. Several children walk over to the table where they can make the picture frame. Several others walk over to the table with the assistant teacher so she can ask the children questions about their mothers. Several other children go to the other areas of the classroom, including the play dough table. Kristen stands by the craft table. The children assigned to this activity sit in the chairs around the table and Kristen gives them all a few markers when they ask for them . Kristen stands by the table for about thirty-five minutes as the children complete the picture frame. During her time leading the craft*

activity, Kristen walks away once when George needs help in the bathroom. Once again Kristen walks away when she observes Brody taking away a toy that Lilly was playing with Kristen walks over and asks, "Brody, did Lilly have that first? Did you ask Lilly if you could use it?" Brody gives the toy back to Lilly and Kristen goes back to the table to help the children with the dot markers for the picture frame. Once everyone has made a picture frame for their mothers, Kristen goes over to several children playing on the rug with a few trucks and farm animals and begins a conversation with them, "Are you working on the farm?" Kristen turns to me and says Sam knows all the types of farm equipment. His dad is a farmer." Then Kristen walks over to the kitchen and asks the children, "What are you making for dinner?" Several children take out some food and Kristen pretends to eat it. Ten minutes after the craft activity was completed Kristen puts on the clean-up music, playtime ends and the children begin running around the room. Kristen and her assistant start directing the children to put the toys away where they belong.

As evidenced in this observation after completing the craft activity Kristen spent about ten minutes participating in children's play. During these ten minutes Kristen asked a couple of questions of the children playing with the farm equipment on the rug. She stood watching them for several minutes. and then walked over to the kitchen area where a few children were pretending to cook. She asked the children what they were making and pretended to eat the food they gave to her. She stood in both these areas not getting down to the child's level and in doing so, limiting the opportunity to engage in conversation. It appeared that Kristen was uncomfortable interacting with children during indoor playtime on activities they initiated. Instead, she needed to be doing something with the children to provide learning during playtime.

Kristen interacted with children in a positive way, showing warmth and acceptance toward the children. The conversations she had, however, consisted of directives and correcting behaviors. For example, at the craft activity, Kristen worked with several children in the following way:

Kristen: What color should we use? Do you want to do a lot of colors? What color do you like?

Billy: (picks up a dot marker and begins to decorate the picture as he hums, making very few dot marks.)

Kristen: You could use a little more color. Here are some more colors. You don't want it to look too white and remember we said you only have to push gently, not on the table.

Michelle, another child sitting at the table was really putting a lot of dots on her picture frame.

Kristen: Michelle those are really, really pretty colors. (Kristen tries to take it to dry, but Michelle is not done and continues covering the picture frame with dots).

Kristen: (To John), "Do you want to do all purple?"

John: Mommy likes purple.

Kristen: Then I think you have enough.

The above conversations consisted mostly of Kristen providing directives regarding what to do to complete the craft activity. There were examples of redirecting behaviors, such as when she asked Billy to push gently, and not on the table. However, there were no multi-turn conversations or meaningful conversations at the craft table. Yet it is these types of conversations with children helps them to use language and builds their vocabulary and this was lacking in the above conversation.

Kristen also used opportunities during children's free play to question children in an effort to engage them in conversations. She explained, "During playtime I use a lot of questions. If the children are in the kitchen, I would ask them what they are making, or in the block area, what did you make today? I walk around and observe. I ask a lot of questions to get them to talk." During the observation, Kristen asked the children a great deal of questions, which were mostly lower level questions and did not provide the opportunity for thinking at a higher level and learning new vocabulary. For example, during an observation prior to the PD initiative, when Kristen was not helping the children with a craft activity, one conversation she had with

the children consisted of fifteen sentences and nine of them were lower level questions. Kristen

asked the children:

> Are you writing your name? Who is yelling at you? Sammy, were you yelling at Brody?
> Do you have to go potty? Who would like to go first? What starts with the letter M?
> Who is coming first? You want to write your own name on this? Do you need help?

These questions were not open-ended and only required one-word answers. In between each

question there was little conversation other than more directives and the correcting of behaviors.

Kristen spent no time listening for the children's answers in order to expand on the conversation.

Even during the craft activity Kristen asked the children many questions. In one conversation

with the children, which consisted of twenty-two sentences, twelve were questions:

> Kristen: (To Mary): What color should we use?
> Mary: Green.
> Kristen: (To Mary): We don't have green. Choose another color.
> Kristen: Do you want to do a lot of colors, Billy? What color would you like?
> Kristen: Does your elbow hurt Michelle?
> Kristen: Brody, you could use a little more color. What are you trying to get?
> Brody: The red.
> Kristen: (To Michelle): Are you done with the red yet?
> Michelle: No.
> Kristen: Do you want dot markers?
> Kristen: (To Brody): You need to ask for them when you need a marker. Here are more
> colors. We don't want it to look too white and remember we said you only have to push
> gently, not on the table.
> Kristen: Very nice. Let's let this dry. You want to paint it?
> Kristen: Do any of our play dough friends want to make their picture frame?   Did you
> go potty? Are you done?
> Michael: What kind of play dough is this?
> Kristen: It's lemon play dough. Did you make your picture frame yet?

Kristen's dialogue, as shown above, consisted of mostly lower level questions. Lower level

questions are basic questions that provide information and generally require a one-word

response. For example, in the above conversation Kristen asks Michelle, "Are you done with the

red yet?" Michelle responds with one word, "No". This type of question limits multi-turn conversations and does not provide opportunities for curiosity and critical thinking. When speaking to another student, Kristen asks, "What color should we use?" Mary responds, "Green," however, Kristen tells Mary, "We don't have green. Choose another color." The response Mary gave could have given Kristen the opportunity to ask another question about how Mary could have made green with the colors that were available, however, Kristen chose not to ask that and, as a result, missed the opportunity to engage in a multi-turn conversation that could have included a discussion about combining colors. Instead, she moved onto asking another child a question.

Thus, in Kristen's classroom, there was little, if any, evidence of any open-ended questions or complex language structures. In addition, even though she believed in having a literacy-rich environment, there was a lack of literacy materials in the classroom.

I had hoped that Kristen's participation in this PD initiative would increase the evidence of literacy in the whole classroom environment and would prompt the addition of writing and books. In the next section, I will describe Kristen's engagement and practices in the PD workshop and reflective sessions.

Engagement in the Professional Development

Kristen arrived late to all six of the PD workshops as well as the reflection sessions that followed. There seemed to always be a parent who picked his or her child up late or someone she had to speak with, even though the PD workshop and reflection sessions had been scheduled. As the facilitator of the PD I got the feeling that the PD and reflection sessions were not as important to her as I hoped they would be. Kristen was prepared and ready to participate in the PD workshops and reflection sessions, however, her contributions were always more defensive

about why the practices and ideas presented could not be used in her classroom. She was engaged the most during the PD workshop and reflection sessions when there was discussion amongst the three teacher participants. However, her participation did not generate new thoughts or ideas.

Going through the motions. Professional development activities are designed to challenge teachers' misconceptions, and prompt teachers to rethink their beliefs and practices (Meriam & Bierema, 2014). Throughout the professional development, Kristen seemed to lack enthusiasm for any new ideas and always found a reason why the idea or suggested practice could not be done. This resistance manifested itself in two ways.

The first resistance Kristen exhibited was related to her direct experiences as a preschool teacher. One example of this occurred during session one after we viewed a video of two different scenarios. Both scenarios had teachers playing with materials. The first video showed the teachers playing with just one kind of material. In the second teachers were playing together using a variety of materials. Kristen said, "That does not work in my classroom. There is always one child that wants all the materials." Another example was in session three during a discussion about what could be added to the classroom to enhance literacy. One of the other teacher participants, Valerie, wanted to create a grocery store by adding baskets and grocery bags for the children to use. Kristen said, "Bags didn't work for our class. The children did not use them as they should have. They just put everything in them." Similarly, she also commented about adding props and materials to her classroom:

> I once had a washer and dryer in the classroom and the children did not use the equipment appropriately. I don't think I would add another piece of equipment to my room.

Continuing with our conversation about adding props and materials to enhance the literacy environment in the classroom, Kristen said, "We had added a shopping cart at one time and all the children did was run with it, so we took it out." Thus, children's behavior was an issue that seemed to mediate Kristen's responsiveness to some of the ideas presented in the workshops. As Kristen explains, "If you are trying to have a conversation with a child and you need to stop and fix a behavior or a child might need help in the bathroom, it cuts the conversation short and by the time you can go back to the child, they lose their train of thought." When the children play outside, Kristen said, "Children don't want to listen. They just want to run and play, so conversations are quicker and children's attention span is less. They just don't talk much outside."

Kristen also showed resistance because of factors related to the organizational structure of the center in which she worked. During the discussion in PD session three about enhancing the literacy environment Kristen said, "That just won't work here at CPNS. We are only with the children for two and a half hours and have so much to accomplish in such a short period of time." Kristen said, "We can't talk to the children because we have so many things to get done, like things to make for Mother's Day."

Similarly, during the first PD workshop sessions, she disagreed during the discussion of the Susan Massey (2004) article about ways and times in the preschool classroom when teachers can have meaningful conversations with children. Kristen said:

> The article was meaningful; however, it didn't pertain to us because we are a different kind of school. We are with the children for only two and a half hours several times a week. The kind of school that was being referenced was a full-time preschool program. We do have a very rich literacy environment and children use words daily without having to teach them. In my classroom children have a chance to write all day and learn all day through play.

Kristen's' resistance to new ideas and practices was also evident in the conversations that took place in the reflection sessions. Each PD workshop session ended with something for the teacher participants to try out in their own classrooms. From her responses, it seemed that Kristen shared practices that were already part of her typical way of doing things rather than trying any of the strategies we were discussing in the PD. In particular, she relied on the strategy of questioning as the way she enhances children's literacy learning during play. For example, during reflection session four the teacher participants were asked to show examples of when they used the meaningful conversation strategies of building opportunities to talk, modeling conversations and using complex language and vocabulary in their classrooms during the previous week. Kristen reported that she uses questions to build opportunities to talk with children. She said:

> Our class enjoys building with the blocks. We always ask the children to tell us what they are building. To expand on the conversation, I ask them about the size or what special blocks they are using. I also ask them, "What does that part do?" "What is it for?" During art time or when children are playing with play dough I ask them, "What are you creating?"

When we focused on the use of reciprocal exchanges, Valerie and Faith gave responses that consisted of back and forth exchanges with the children. They shared what they said and what the children said. Kristen's response was more about the questions she asked the children during a pet unit. The example that Kristen shared was explained as follows:

> Kristen: For my example when we were talking about pets "we" asked the children what kind of pets they had, what was the name of their pets. "We" also asked the children what color their pets were? "We" then asked them how we take care of them? One child said, "You have to feed them." I then asked, "What do you do to show you love them?"
>
> Kristen: That was kind of the back and forth exchanges we had. Some of the questions we asked and some the children asked. This led us into the lesson about taking care of their pets.

Facilitator: Did you ask the children these questions during circle time or playtime?
Kristen: It was a little bit of both, such as when the children were at the grooming station we would ask the children what do you do at the groomers. Why do you have groomers?

Thus, Kristen went through the motions during the PD workshops and reflection sessions. She did what was expected, she attended every session, and she participated. However, she did not seem to try out anything new, such as focusing on reciprocal exchanges in her practice but instead relied on strategies she was familiar with like questioning.

Kristen's Literacy Practices during and after the Intervention

While I had hoped that Kristen's participation in this PD initiative would prompt the addition of children's writing and books in her classroom environment and improve her conversations with children, there was minimal change in her practices. Few literacy materials were added to her classroom and she continued to rely on questioning as her primary strategy for developing children's oral language skills. Moreover, her emphasis during indoor playtime was always getting children to complete an art project. Working with the children completing their art projects limited the opportunities for Kristen to have extended and meaningful conversations with the children.

The literacy environment. One of our PD sessions covered setting up an enhanced literacy environment. Including props and materials that spark children's interest and curiosity tends to increase children's conversation which leads to an increase a child's literacy development (Morrow & Rand, 1990; Neumann & Roskos, 1993; Vukelich, 1994). One of the longer themes studied was a pet unit which lasted for two weeks. Kristen was given additional funding to purchase items for the children to use, however, she said, "I have plenty of materials and props for this unit." I asked her to have parents bring in empty pet food containers for the children to pretend with. Kristen said, "I have plenty of things for the children to use and I don't

need anything more for the pet unit." Two other themes were observed which included Mother's

Day, and friendship. No additional props and materials were added for either of these themes.

Figure 11 shows the props and materials for Kristen's pet unit in her classroom. As can

be seen, the area lacks any books or writing materials and both pictures look uninviting and

disorganized.

Figure 11. Example of props and materials for a pet theme.

For preschoolers to engage in more meaningful conversations, teachers need to be

intentional about adding the appropriate props and materials necessary to support this type of

conversation (Morrow, 1990; Neumann, Hood, Ford & Neumann, 2011; Neuman & Roskos,

1990; Petrakos & Howe, 1996; Vukelich, 1994). Teachers also need to be intentional about

adding books and props that will encourage writing that is meaningful for children (Morrow,

1990; Neumann et al., 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Petrakos & Howe, 1996; Vukelich,

1994). However, this was not what was observed in Kristen's classroom.

A reliance on questioning. Several strategies, such as reciprocal exchanges, expanding

on what children say, and building opportunities to talk, are strategies that help teachers expand

their conversations with children. These were new strategies introduced during the PD

intervention, however, Kristen consistently reverted to what she was most comfortable using, the

strategy of questioning.

Kristen talked about using the strategy of questioning throughout the PD and this strategy was noticeable in her practice as well. Kristen said, "I use a lot of questioning. The types of questions are dependent on the activity of the children. If the children are in the kitchen, or in the block area, I might ask, what did you make today? What does it look like?" She also shared, "My assistant and I walk around the classroom and observe the children and ask a lot of questions to get the children to talk." Outdoor playtime was also a time when Kristen used the strategy of questioning. Kristen said, "Sometimes the slide gets wet from the overnight dew or perhaps rain. I always ask the children to check the slide to see if it's wet and then they have to report their findings to everyone." In addition, she said, "If they are in the sandbox, I might ask them did you ever go to the beach?" From her perspective, questioning "keeps the learning going and… it gets the children talking." During a twenty-minute observation during outdoor playtime, the following took place.

Kristen stands near the fence as Mary comes by:

Mary: I want to ride a bike.
Kristen: There is a bike right here.
Mary: I don't want that bike. I want that one" and points to the bike Jacob is riding.
Kristen: Jacob when you are finished will you share your bike with Mary?" Mary walks away.

Several minutes go by and there is a disturbance Kristen notices happening near the slide. She walks over and says to the children,

Kristen: We don't want our friends to get wet on the slide. Kristen laughs as she takes the towel from Sammy and finishes wiping down the slide. She notices several children near the swings, finishes drying the slide and walks over to the swings.

Kristen: What happened? Did your foot get stuck? You need to pump and tuck your feet under when you go back. They won't get stuck that way. George, don't walk in front of the swings.
Kristen walks toward the sandbox: Oh my, that's a big hole. Boys and girls let's put the sand in the buckets so we can fill up the hole.

Charlie: It's a booby trap.

Kristen: Who are you going to catch in the trap?

Charlie: Aggie.

Kristen: How come? She turns to Aggie and says, are they going to catch you?

Kristen: What else can you catch?

Child: A coconut.

Another Child: The ocean.

Kristen: Are we at the beach?

Child: No.

Kristen: The real beach has an ocean.

Kristen: What do you catch in a booby trap?

Sammy: It's a sticky trap.

Kristen: How does it work Sammy"

Sammy: It works. I'm filling it back up.

Kristen: What will happen if you turn the blue bucket over? Want me to help you?

Sammy walks over to the outside of the sandbox and turns over the blue bucket by himself.

Kristen: That was silly. You have to keep the sand in the sandbox.

Kristen says to another child who is playing in the sand box: Luke, remember it's not really the beach. We don't want to get sand all over us.

Kristen (To Brody): Are you making another castle Brody? You have a shovel that works perfectly good. Take a deep breath. I see another shovel. What's wrong with this one? Maybe Luke would like to change shovels. You could always use your hands. They are good scoopers.

Brody (To Luke): Can I use your shovel?

Kristen (To Brody): Wasn't that nice? You used your great words.

Sammy: I'm making a pyramid.

Kristen: Sammy how do you know about pyramids. Did you ever see a pyramid?

Kristen (to Charlie): What is that? Sand?

Charlie: No little pebbles.

Kristen: These are not pebbles.

Charlie: They are things that are at the beach. They are pebbles.

Kristen: These are not pebbles. These are things that came from the tree. They are part of nature.

Kristen: (The church bell rings): It's time to go inside.

During this twenty-minute outdoor playtime, Kristen asked ten questions, however, they were mostly ones that could be answered with just one or a few words. There was only one higher order question: "How does it work Sammy?" This is when Kristen could have expanded on the

conversation and provided vocabulary, such as the word "capture," that would have connected to what Sammy was doing with the booby trap. During this conversation, Kristen also provided many directives and continuously managed behaviors.

During the final observation of outdoor playtime Kristen stood back and let the children play as they chose. Her role as the teacher during outdoor playtime was one of an observer and protector. She was there to make sure the children were engaged and stayed safe. During the last outdoor playtime observation, the class spent a little more than twenty minutes outside. Most of Kristen's time was spent standing by the fence observing the children ride bikes. As the children passed her by she engaged in some conversations with children using questions:

> Kristen: Here is a bike. Jacob when you are finished will you share it?
> Kristen: Does it feel like it's wobbling Jacob?
> Kristen: We don't want our friends' feet to get run over.
> Kristen: What happened? Did your feet get stuck?
> Walking over to the sandbox, Kristen: Oh my, last time the hole was so big.
> Kristen: Be careful when you run on the sand. Go, go, go.
> Walking over to the swings, Kristen: Jacob don't run in front of the swings.

The dialogue again consisted of a small number of four questions and two directives out of eight sentences. During this outdoor time, there were no conversations that expanded on the children's thoughts and there was no mention of any new vocabulary words.

This pattern of using low level questions and managing children's behavior was also evident during indoor playtime. I did not observe Kristen interacting with children except on the art projects she had carefully organized. Just as in the first observation of playtime where the children were making a picture frame for their mothers using dot markers, each of the remaining observations of playtime also consisted of a craft activity with the focus on the product. Getting every child to participate in these projects resulted in little or no time for Kristen to do anything else during playtime but help children complete the craft activity.

During one observation after the PD intervention began the children were learning about pets. The activity during playtime was to graph the pets the children have at home. The children came to the table and drew a picture of their pet under each of the categories, dog, cat, fish, or horse. The conversation during this activity was as follows:

> Kristen: Mary, what did you draw?
> Mary: My cat.
> Kristen: What is your cat's name?
> Mary: Buttercup.
> Kristen: Jacob come and draw a picture of your pet.

After encouraging each child to draw a picture of his or her pet, it was time to clean up. If a child did not have a pet, Kristen asked them to draw a picture of their favorite stuffed animal. Other than asking each child the name of their pets, the only other conversation Kristen had during this observation was helping children with the bathroom or managing behaviors.

In another observation, completed on Wednesday, May 25 the children continued working on the pet unit. They were learning about fish as pets. The activity during playtime was to create a goldfish by sponge painting and placing glitter on a fish shape. The activity was set up at one table for six children. Each child had a paper with a fish shape. There was paint on paper plates and sponges for the children to use. There was also a box to put the finished painting in so the children could add gold glitter to it. The other table was set for four children to play with play dough. Kristen stayed at the fish activity table and helped the children get the paints and put the glitter on the fish.

> Kristen: Let me have six friends come to the craft table, Nicole, George, Sammy, Xavier, Brody and Neve.
> Nicole: I want the red paint.
> Kristen: You should use a few more colors.
> Brody finishes first and Kristen helps him put his fish in the box.
> Kristen: Okay Brody, sprinkle some glitter on your fish.
> Kristen: Now let's shake the box together.

Kristen: Look how beautiful your fish is. Put it in your cubby.

The conversations continued in the same way with the rest of the children. As space opened up at the table Kristen continued to call another child over until everyone completed the activity.

While Kristen worked with children on the projects she engaged children in conversations by questioning them about their project as evidenced in all of the observations. During the last observation, this questioning was evident in the following exchange when the children were making friendship books during playtime. Fourteen piles of cut out hands for each child in the class were on the craft table. The colors were different and some children had their names written on their hands, but some did not (see figure 12. Traced Handprint Activity). This activity was completed one on one with Kristen and one child. The children went to the various areas of the classroom while they waited their turn to complete the handprint activity with Kristen. Kristen called Sammy to the table she was at with the children's cut out hands.

> Kristen: Okay Sammy we will go around the table and pick up one hand for each friend in your class.
> Sammy looks around at the other children playing. He begins to pick up a handprint.
> Kristen: That hand is Aggie's.
> Sammy continues and picks up the next one.
> Kristen: That hand is Brody's.

Walking around the table with Kristen picking up a hand print for each child in the class continues until every handprint is in one little packet.

> Kristen: I'll punch a hole in it. (She punches a hole in the corner and ties a yellow ribbon through it.)
> Giving the booklet to Sammy, Kristen: Now put this in your cubby so you could always remember your friends in your class this year.
> Sammy follows her directions. He puts the booklet in his cubby and goes to play with his friends.
> Kristen continues this process with each child. The process lasts for forty-five minutes.
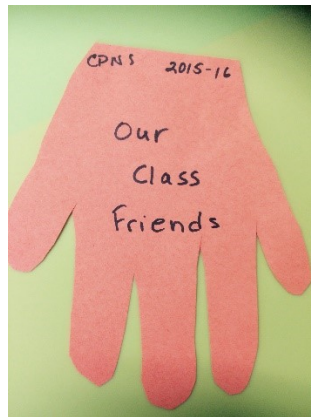
Figure 12. Traced handprint activity.

As the children walked around the table, many of them looked everywhere else but on the table with the hands. They appeared to not be interested in the activity. There were other more interesting things to do in the classroom and other children to talk to. This activity was something the teacher felt needed to go home so the children could remember their friends from this class. The activity took almost the entire playtime and limited Kristen's opportunities to have meaningful conversations with the children.

In each observation, the focus during playtime continued to be on completing the craft activity and the only strategy Kristen used was that of questioning, however, the questions she asked did not require more than one word or short answers. As a consequence the discourse in Kristen's classroom was not of the kind that could help enhance children's vocabulary or oral language. As Kristen did not think she should intervene in children's play, opportunities for expanding children's talk and oral language were missed.

Summary

Her participation in the PD was not necessarily resistant, however, it appeared to me, as the facilitator of the PD, that she thought of the PD as something she had to do because as the

director of the school I asked her to participate. While my observations suggest that Kristen's

practices did not change over the course of the professional development, her SELA scores

suggest that she may have been trying to implement some of the teaching strategies in her

practice.

The SELA measures the quality of language and literacy development that teachers

provide in their classrooms (Smith et al., 2001). Each item is individually scored and represents

an increase or decrease in that specific item. Each of the nineteen items could receive a score of

one to five. The total score could have ranged from a nineteen to a maximum of ninety-five.

The total rating for Kristen's literacy practices went down from a 53 to a 52, however, several

items that were the focus of the PD increased Table 7 below shows the scores for each item from

the initial rating prior to the PD and the final rating upon completion of the PD. As can be seen

Kristen scored higher on the items "teachers encouraging children to use and extend their

conversations," "the ways teachers introduced new words, concepts and linguistic structures," as

well as the "promotion of language development." These were all strategies that were discussed

in the professional development.

However, the items that decreased or where there was no change included "providing

activities and materials that were developmentally appropriate," and "books, writing materials or

print usage and evidence in the classroom." The lack of improvement or no changes made in the

physical environment might be attributed to the assessment being completed the last week of

school. Teachers begin to put things away and distribute children's work so it can go home

before the school year ends. But given Kristen's responses to making adjustments to the

classroom environment perhaps no change might be expected. However, all teachers were

encouraged to maintain the appropriate teaching environment until after the children leave for the summer.

Table 7

Kristen's SELA Ratings before and after the PD

Kristen's SELA Ratings Before and After the PD			
Item #	Item	Rating Prior to PD	Rating After the PD
1	Print is used in the environment for a purpose	3	2
2	There is an inviting place where children can look at books	2	2
3	The environment promotes interest in a wide variety of books	2	2
4	Writing materials are available and easy for children to use	3	3
5	A variety of literacy items and props are used in the pretend play area	3	3
6	In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept	2	4
7	Teachers speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts, and linguistic structures	2	4
8	Organizing activities that promote language development	3	4
9	Teachers read books to children in ways that build language, knowledge, and love of books	4	4
10	Calling attention to the functions and features of print	4	4
11	Drawing children's attention to the sounds they hear in words	3	3

12	Teachers help children recognize letters	2	2
13	Teachers promote children's interest in writing	2	2
16	Activities and materials are age appropriate	4	3
17	Children can choose from a variety of developmentally appropriate materials	3	3
18	Teachers show warmth, interest, and acceptance toward children	5	5
19	Teachers promote positive interactions among children	5	3
	Total Score	**53**	**52**

However, despite this slight change in Kristen's scores, my observations of her classroom and her participation in the PD, suggest that her literacy practices did not improve. Kristen was confident in her literacy beliefs and practices, however these beliefs and practices limited the opportunities for children to develop oral language and learn vocabulary so important for reading. She told me, "You can overwhelm them. Someone could take this to another level and add so many things. Children might be turned off." This statement leads me to believe that Kristen still has a misunderstanding of how oral language and vocabulary can be taught during playtime. Kristen, felt she knew all she needed to know about oral language and vocabulary development. She said that if she were to choose next year's PD, the topic would be "something different, like math."

Valerie: Making Slight Changes after Trying Things Out

Valerie is a seasoned early childhood professional who has been working at Caring Partners Nursery School (CPNS) for the past five years. Valerie is a dedicated teacher. She

always completes the necessary paperwork for our National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation as well as requirements (e.g. professional development hours) for the NJ Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing in a timely manner. She is a teacher who delivers when she is asked to do something, such as making changes in her lesson plans or classroom environment. Similarly, Valerie also ensures that parents' needs are met and that communication occurs without help or reminders.

Given her commitment to completing the various duties associated with her role in a serious and professional manner, Valerie was an active and committed participant in the professional development initiative. Because Valerie is an enthusiastic learner who is open to new ideas and change, she was the teacher in whom I expected to see the biggest changes. However, while Valerie did try some ideas out during the professional development, she made only slight changes in her practice. In what follows I first describe Valerie's beliefs and practices about pre-K education, which gives the reader a sense of Valerie as a teacher. I then describe Valerie's engagement and participation in the PD initiative and finish the case study with Valerie's classroom practices during and after the PD.

Beliefs and Practices Before the Professional Development Initiative

Valerie and her assistant teacher, teach 16, four and five-year-old children. Whenever someone walks into Valerie's classroom during playtime it is obvious that the children are engaged in many different activities. However, for Valerie, teaching is about imparting information to children. Therefore, her beliefs about pre-K, literacy, and about teaching through play tended to emphasize teacher-led instruction. As a consequence, prior to the PD, I did not observe Valerie engaging in much teaching during, and through, play.

Beliefs about pre-K. Valerie describes pre-K as, "A magical time for children, it's everything." Pre-K for Valerie is a time when children learn many things. As Valerie expressed during her first interview:

> Children learn social skills, how to get along with each other, and how to use their words. They also investigate and explore as they continue to build on the knowledge they have, whether in the science area or the kitchen. As they play they come to their own conclusions about things. They model things they see, maybe in the kitchen making cupcakes because that is what they did with mom or in the blocks, building something they did with dad. During preschool children have the chance to do things they might not be able to do at home such as use various art materials, use scissors or paint at the easel. They learn to be in a classroom and listen to adults with a group of peers. They have the opportunity to observe things on the walls, see numbers and letters and wonder about new things they will experience in the classroom.

Thus, for Valerie, pre-K is about supporting children's overall development by providing enriching activities. It is by allowing children to explore materials and concepts in the classroom that they learn new things.

But pre-K, as Valerie comments, is also when, "Children learn to be comfortable in a classroom setting and learn to follow certain routines."   In other words, pre-K is also about preparing children for school, which is why oral language and literacy are so important.

Beliefs about oral language and literacy. For Valerie, literacy is about symbols, such as letters, numbers, and pictures and children learning how to read and write these symbols.

> Children need to learn how to write their names. They need to know letters, especially those in their names and those of their friends' names. Children need to see numerals and know that they represent a number of objects. Children also need to know how to handle books and understand what the parts of a book include; the cover, the front, back, as well as that there is an author and illustrator. They need to know that letters make up words and there are spaces between words that say something. They need to use a journal by writing scribble marks or alphabet letters to represent pictures they draw.

According to Valerie, "It's important for children to see words and hear words in a variety of ways including the written form with pictures and labels."

A central way children become literate, from Valerie's perspective, is by developing their oral language skills. She said, "Oral language is very important in developing future reading skills, communications, social skills, and being able to express themselves using words." Oral language in Valerie's classroom is facilitated "from the moment they come in the door until they leave by having discussions with children." Her classroom is filled with talk. Valerie makes room for talk by setting up instructional events such as large group time, shared reading, and small group time, where she specifically focuses on teacher-led activities to encourage children to talk.

One of the ways Valerie encourages children to speak is through show and tell, which is a daily routine where four or five children bring something in from their homes and have the opportunity to tell the other children about what they brought in to show them. Show & tell in Valerie's classroom is done when the children arrive for the day during large group time. Valerie describes her show & tell time as follows:

> When the children arrive at school they wash hands and then sit down on the large group rug. I begin by asking the child what they brought in. After they tell the group about the item I begin by asking a question. Some children may be shy or not comfortable speaking in a large group especially when children are watching, however, as the year continues they develop confidence.

As Valerie explains, "It's a perfect opportunity for oral language. We ask questions about what the children bring in and encourage the other children to ask questions as well." Valerie assesses children's oral language development during show & tell. She explains:

> During show & tell I take a snap shot of the child and their ability to talk. As the year progresses children are more able to explain what they brought in and answer questions about their show & tell. I might begin with the question, "What did you bring in to show us today?" If they say it's their favorite toy, I might ask them, "Why is it your favorite?" I also might ask, "What do you do with it?"

Valerie believes that preschool is a time for children to discover and explore as well as try new things out. It is also a place for children to have the opportunity to be supported in their learning of vocabulary and oral language. For Valerie, literacy and oral language are important foundational skills in preparing for kindergarten. As she explains:

> For preschoolers, literacy is oral. They are not reading yet, however, they are excited about seeing words they already know and singing songs with familiar and new words. Seeing the words they say and those words they hear read in a book or written is a must. Seeing and hearing words inspires children to want to continue to learn. There is so much opportunity to develop children's vocabulary and literacy whether written or oral.

Beliefs about play. Valerie believes that children learn through play whether during outdoor or indoor playtime. She said, "They don't realize that there is a purpose to what they are playing with and that they are learning while they are playing." Play, according to Valerie, is also an opportunity for children to talk. She explains, "Playtime is a great opportunity to have conversations with each other. The children will talk about what they are doing and speak with the friends that want to join the play."

While recognizing play as an important time for children to interact with one another, Valerie viewed play as an instructional event; a space teachers should use to develop children's language. Valerie explains:

> It's the teacher's job to give the children language and infuse new vocabulary into the children's play. It is also up to the teachers to make the connections between play and oral language by including props and materials that encourage conversations.

In short, for Valerie, "Play is a time to learn new things, to talk with each other, and a perfect opportunity to learn new vocabulary. There are so many opportunities to develop their vocabulary." For Valerie, introducing new words is done by the teacher and the continuous learning of new words happens during all of the components of the day, including playtime.

Practices. While Valerie reported that she engaged children in talk and vocabulary building experiences during play, what I observed was that most of her literacy work with children took place in teacher led large and small groups. During play the main way Valerie extended children's language learning was by setting up the environment, building vocabulary, and engaging children in a small group activity.

Classroom environment. Valerie deliberately saw the classroom environment as central to making sure children have the opportunity for conversations and exploration. In her words preschool is, "A time to introduce new and fun things, and let children have many experiences." The children in her class, as she says, "Have free range to move about the room and play in any area of their choice." To facilitate children's choice making, Valerie's classroom of 540 square feet is organized into several areas of interest for the children, such as a library area, block, art, dramatic play, manipulative, and a writing center (see figure 13). The bathroom is just outside the classroom door next to the art area. The snack area is also located outside of the classroom, near the door next to the block area. There is one large rug for a group time and a larger table used for small group time.
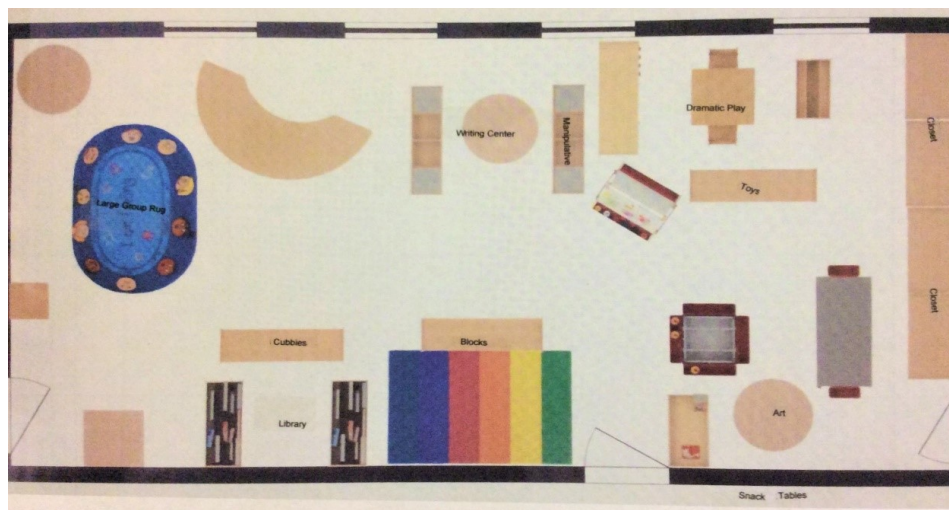

Figure 13. Valerie's classroom environment prior to the PD intervention.

For Valerie, changing props and materials in her classroom makes it more interesting for children. She explained:

> Bringing in new materials into the classroom makes the room fresh and new. It brings the excitement children need to want to come to school. What I have in my room can always be changed up to provide opportunities for different conversations.

In keeping with her beliefs, within each area props and materials are added to enhance the children's learning and increase opportunities for conversation. These props and materials usually relate to the theme that Valerie is teaching. For example, during the observation prior to the PD initiative, Valerie provided a lesson about keeping teeth healthy using teacher-led instruction during large and small group time. She added materials and props about the dentist and teeth throughout the classroom. At the easel, there were large tooth shapes for the children to paint. There was a tooth puzzle for the children to put together and there were pictures of teeth and books about teeth in many areas of the classroom. On another table, pictures of all kinds of foods could be found for the children to glue onto a happy or sad tooth picture.

In addition to thematic materials, literacy was emphasized in various areas of the classroom. The dramatic play area included a recipe book that children were able to use to create a variety of pretend foods. The block area included building displays along with words, see figure 14.

Figure 14. Valerie's classroom block area.

Valerie's classroom had a writing center, (see figure 15) which consisted of various writing utensils such as markers, crayons and pencils as well as an easel to use for writing.

Figure 15. Valerie's writing center.

Valerie's classroom library area (see figure 16) consisted of a variety of books, an author's wall and a rug to sit on while reading. The author's wall displays a new author each month. The books the author wrote are displayed on the wall and those are the books that are read during shared book reading time. The books shown in figure 16 below are those written by the author Eric Carle. Also, a listening area can be found behind the bookshelf next to the door (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Valerie's classroom library area.

It has been well documented that creating a language-rich environment has a significant

effect on children's opportunities to learn oral language and vocabulary (Neuman & Roskos,

1990; Noble & Foster, 1993; Vukelich, 1990). Valerie's environment provided a great deal of

stimulation with the addition of the letter and word displays throughout her classroom (see figure
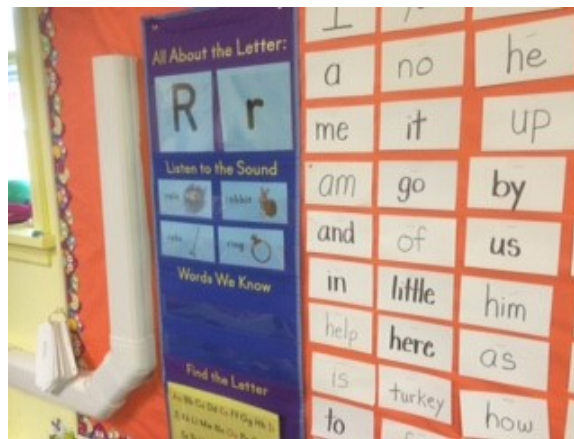
17).

Figure 17. Letters and words displayed in Valerie's classroom.

In addition to creating a literacy-enriched environment, another strategy Valerie used during the

components of her day was the introduction of new vocabulary and the meaning of these new

words through conversations during teacher-led activities.

  Building vocabulary. Valerie emphasized, in her interview, the importance of teaching

vocabulary throughout her time with her students whether it is during large group time, shared

book reading, outdoor play, or indoor play. Valerie says, "I find ways to expand children's

language." Valerie explains, "I introduce new vocabulary and incorporate it into the daily

routine." For example when the children were discussing plants as part of a Mother's Day gift,

Valerie describes how she built vocabulary with the children around plants:

> We read a book about a sunflower because we were going to plant seeds for Mother's
> Day. We talked about the life cycle of a sunflower and used the word germinate. We

also used the word germinate in the context of the story. I asked the children what do you think it means, it sounds like germs, but we are not talking about germs. I'll introduce the new word germinate and ask the children what do seeds do? I gather information that the children have or may not have and say here is a picture of the seed that germinated, see the little things coming down from the seed, they are called rrr…roots. We talk about how the seeds burst open and eventually a little sprout appears and that's a new word for them. In one lesson, you can introduce many new words. During the week, I may hear the children use the new words. I might ask a child how long do you think it'll take to germinate?   When we put bean seeds in a bag we'll talk about germination again. I will also write the word. It's fun for the children to see the word written. It will be a new word in their vocabulary.

When I walked into the classroom to observe Valerie, she also used routines to teach vocabulary. For example, during her opening or welcome time she drew children's attention to particular words, such as in the vignette below:

> *Sixteen children sit on the large group rug. The assistant teacher sits in a chair on one side of the rug and the teacher, Valerie, is on the other. The children stand and put their right hands over their hearts to recite the "Pledge of Allegiance." Valerie explains to the children, "Since we are all learning the Pledge of Allegiance, I just want to tell you that when we say the flag salute we are being respectful. Does anyone know what respectful means?" The children sit in silence, and Valerie says, "It means that we are proud of our flag and our country." After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, the children sit back down in the circle.*

Not only were the children participating in the welcoming time, but Valerie also incorporated the teaching of the word "respectful" as they were reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance."

The main way Valerie taught vocabulary was through teacher-led instruction. Valerie explains, "In one lesson I can introduce the children to many new words. I not only say the word but will write it as well. For children, it's fun to see the word written as well as spoken." During the large group time following the Pledge of Allegiance, Valerie would talk with children about the theme and particular vocabulary associated with the theme. As mentioned previously, the children were learning about teeth when I visited the classroom.

"Okay, children," Valerie begins, "Let's talk about what it takes to keep our teeth happy and healthy." Valerie picks up a picture of a tooth with a smile and says, "This is a happy tooth. What do you think makes this tooth happy?" Several children begin to shout out answers. For example, Charlie shouts, "It has a smile." Sammy says, "The dentist takes care of it." Valerie says, "Don't forget we need to raise our hands if we want to talk. It's hard to hear everyone at the same time and what you have to say is important." Andrew raises his hand and says, "Food makes teeth healthy." This conversation continues until everyone has a chance to speak. Valerie then reads two poems about teeth and explains what the word "decay" means and what makes a tooth sad. Valerie says, "A sad tooth isn't clean. It has decay. Decay is something that happens to our teeth if we don't take care of them. It's not good for our teeth to eat too many sweet things. Brushing our teeth takes care of them. That's why it's important that we brush our teeth and do our best to keep them clean." Valerie continues large group time and reads Nature's Toothbrush to the children.

Here, Valerie used circle time as a time to teach vocabulary as she taught the meaning of the word "decay" to the children. Not only did Valerie build children's vocabulary, but she also tried to engage children in conversations. She mentioned, "I use pictures of things related to what we are learning to encourage discussions." The poem about decay was written on a decorative shape with pictures as can be seen in figure 17 below. By displaying the word as Valerie did in the poem below children have additional exposure to the word decay. Providing children with a variety of ways of being exposed to the words helps to deepen their understanding of the word (Beck & McKeown, 2007).
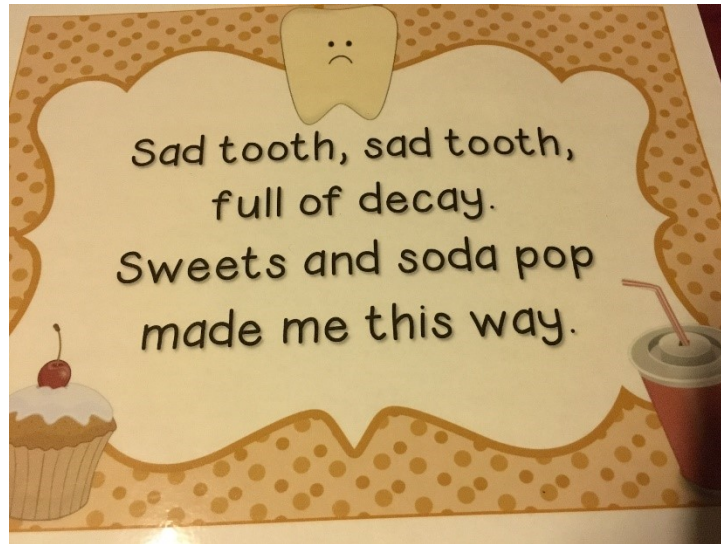
Figure 17. Poem about tooth decay.

Small group during playtime. While Valerie emphasized the importance of play as a

time for children to explore ideas, she typically used playtime as an instructional event, leading

children in some kind of activity related to the theme. For example, after the story "Nature's

Toothbrush" the class broke up into groups; some went to a small group activity, which Valerie

led while the rest of the children went to play in other areas of the classroom. As children

finished with Valerie's teacher-led activity, other children came to the table with Valerie to

complete the activity as can be seen in the following observation:

> *Ben, Trevor, Sam and Taylor walk to the small group table. Each child has a few pages*
> *that are in the shape of a small book. Valerie says to the children, "Okay, put your name*
> *on the front page so we know that the book belongs to you. You will be the author of this*
> *book. Put your pencil down when you are done. If your pencil is still wiggling, I'll know*
> *you are still writing." Several minutes pass and all four children put their pencils down.*
> *Valerie gives each child a small mirror and a chocolate Oreo cookie and says to the*
> *children, "Okay, now each of you needs to eat the cookie." The children pick up the*
> *cookie and eat the whole cookie. Then Valerie says, "Open your mouth and look in the*
> *mirror. Now on the next page of your book draw a picture of what you see." The*
> *children pick up the crayons and draw a picture of what they see in the mirror. Sam*
> *says, "Yuck, it looks gross." Trevor says, "Mine does too." The children laugh and*
> *continue drawing what they see in the mirror. Valerie says to the children, "If we don't*
> *clean our teeth, these things like the Oreo could lead to 'decay'. Remember that was the*

word we talked about in circle time. Once the children are done, Valerie gives each child
an apple and says, "Now you need to draw a picture of the apple on the next page of your
book." The children finish their pictures and, Valerie says, "Okay, now let's eat the
apple." The children finish chewing and, Valerie says, "Open your mouth and look in
the mirror. What do you see?" Taylor and Sam say together, "The chocolate is gone!"
Valerie says, "The apple cleaned your teeth even without brushing. It was nature's way
of cleaning your teeth. Now you need to draw a picture of what you see in the mirror on
the next page of your book." The children finish and Valerie says, "We are almost done.
Turn the book over and write the words, 'The End' and then your book will be complete.
Put it in your cubby and take it home to read to your family. You will need to add your
words to the pictures as you read it to your family." The next group of children comes
over and Valerie goes through the entire process again with that group until everyone
has a turn.

The above vignette describes a teacher-led activity during playtime. Valerie used the new

vocabulary word "decay," providing context for the new word along with information about

keeping teeth healthy during this activity. The children were making their own books about what

they were experiencing as they were learning about keeping their teeth clean. Each child's book

included the front and back of the book and the books included words and pictures that the

children added.

This small group activity was teacher-led and took up the entire playtime. As Valerie

was so focused on the small group activity, there was limited opportunity for meaningful

conversations with the children during playtime. Research finds this to be the case in other

classrooms, in that extended conversations and higher-level talk has been found to be somewhat

infrequent and at times non-existent in many preschool classrooms (Justice et al., 2008; Massey,

2004; Massey et al., 2008; Smith & Dickinson, 1994). However, when I observed Valerie during

outside playtime, she engaged several children in a conversation about an inchworm and the

following occurred:

Sam finds an inchworm near the sandbox, and brings it over to Valerie. He says, "I
found a worm." Valerie says, "It's an inchworm. Let's watch it move." Several
children come over to see what's happening and Valerie says again, "This is an

inchworm. Let's watch it move." Valerie asks, "Does anyone want to hold the inch worm?" Sam volunteers, "I'll hold it." Valerie picks the inchworm up and places it on Sam's hand. Sam says, "It tickles." Valerie asks the children, "Why do you think we call this an inchworm?" No one responds and Valerie says, "Because it is about an inch long." Valerie asks another question, "What do you think they eat?" Jamison says, "Probably sand. That's why he was near the sandbox. He was going for lunch." Valerie responds, "Sand is small so they could eat it, but it's probably not nourishing enough. They need food that would give them vitamins like we need to grow big and strong. They might eat leaves." The children scatter and look for leaves to feed the inchworm. Several children come back and place the leaves near the inchworm; however, the inchworm does not eat any of them. After several minutes, the children lose interest and go play elsewhere.

During the first interview Valerie said, "Outside play gives us more of an opportunity to talk about things we don't do inside, like bouncing balls, riding trikes, building sand castles. Outdoor play gives children the opportunity to have conversations with each other and engage in imaginative play." Without the teacher led activity, it seems Valerie has more time to talk with children during outdoor playtime. In the above vignette, for example, Valerie was able to enhance the children's learning about inchworms. She drew on the children's interests and asked several questions that required more than one word or short answers, all when the children were playing.

So for Valerie, teaching is done by incorporating a specific theme introduced during large group time. The addition of props and materials in the various areas of the classroom enhances the learning of the theme. Vocabulary related to the theme is also taught during large group time through conversations that include the explanation of new words associated with a theme.

Considering the literacy skills Valerie was already using, such as building vocabulary, having conversations with children, and adding props and materials to enhance the literacy in her classroom I hoped that her participation in this PD initiative would add to her existing

knowledge and help her to incorporate some new strategies during playtime. In the next section I will describe Valerie's engagement and practices in the PD workshop and reflective sessions.

Engagement in the Professional Development

Given Valerie's commitment to doing her job well, it was not surprising that she was the one teacher who always arrived first to the PD and reflection sessions. Valerie was always organized and ready to do what was expected, and this diligence continued throughout the PD intervention. Valerie was willing to listen and try the assigned activities in her own classroom, but she only participated in the PD when necessary.

Participating when necessary. As the leader of the PD, the most striking aspect of Valerie's participation was that when something was required, it was done, but when there was no clear expectation Valerie was the quietest teacher participant. Valerie only spoke when she had to. The instructional approaches that seemed to engage Valerie's participation were the use of protocols, and the assigned tasks for participants to try out and discuss in the reflection sessions.

Protocols. Protocols included specific prompts and were deliberately chosen to encourage everyone's participation in the PD initiative. Each of the protocols used provided the teacher participants opportunities to not only take turns responding to a particular prompt, but also listen to what others had to say (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter & McDonald, 2013). For Valerie, this type of structure seemed to engage her in the initiative. Whenever a protocol was employed, Valerie was an active participant in the PD, speaking an average of eight times during the PD workshops. However when no protocol or prompt was used during the PD workshops two and three, Valerie participated an average of two times.

For example, in session five we used the 4 A's protocol to discuss the Susan Massey (2004) article about the conversations teachers have with children in the preschool classroom. The 4 A's protocol required responses about the assumptions the author makes, the concepts the teacher participant agreed with, what they disagreed with, and the parts of the text they wanted to implement in their own practice (McDonald et al., 2013). The following took place:

PD Facilitator: What assumptions does the author of the text make?

Faith: The article says that cognitively challenging talk is somewhat infrequent. However, I feel like we do a lot of talking.

Valerie: The author was making assumptions based on maybe franchised schools, not small schools like ours. It sounded like the school was a full day preschool. The teachers were able to read to the children for a minimum of 45 minutes divided into three sessions during the day. We read every day, however, not for 45 minutes, we only have two and a half hours for our class time and need to fit so many things in. We do a lot more than we think we do.

Kristen: I felt insulted because I have many conversations with the children.

PD Facilitator: What do you agree with in the text?

Kristen: You need to vary conversations and questions based on children's developmental level.

Valerie: In the beginning of the year when the children might be shy you need to give them opportunities for success and ask them questions that would be easier to answer so they could build their confidence. As the year goes on you will have more opportunities to build the child's confidence and develop their thinking by asking more cognitively challenging questions.

Faith: It is important to converse with children, however, first children have to trust and feel secure before they talk to you.

PD Facilitator: What do you want to argue with the text?

Kristen: I think teachers need to flow through the classroom and should not be stationary.

Valerie: We do spend time stationary when we work in small groups.

Faith: Children have little opportunity to elaborate on teachers questions and statements.

Valerie: There was no mention of using conversations during math and science. Additional activities in math and science can produce cognitively challenging conversations and include new vocabulary such as probability, estimating, balance, scale, observation, and predictions.

PD Facilitator: What parts of the text do you want to aspire to or act upon?

Valerie: I would like to be more intentional about being engaged in cognitively challenging conversations.

As seen above, Valerie's responses provided details that supported each prompt. For example in her argument with the text she thought that during math and science activities there would be opportunities for a great deal of conversations that could build vocabulary. Valerie offered that perhaps a great deal of oral language and vocabulary development would occur during the teaching of these particular subjects. During this conversation there were several opportunities when probing might have pushed Valerie's beliefs and practices about play. For example, I could have probed to determine what kind of things Valerie would add to the art cart and block area to encourage play and conversations.

In PD session one we also used the 4 A's protocol after reading the Bodrova and Leong (2003) article about how teachers could use language and literacy during play. The following conversation took place:

PD Facilitator: What assumptions does the author of the text make?

Kristen: You should not assume that children will use props in an imaginative way.

Faith: I always question when to intervene with the children's play.

Valerie: You should not assume that all children play in a similar way. I don't think that's the case.

PD Facilitator: What do you agree with in the text?

Faith: I agree it is a delicate balance of when to intervene with children's play.

Kristen: I agree with that as well.

Valerie: Play is an opportune time to encourage language whether during imaginative play or at any time.

PD Facilitator: What do you want to argue with the text?

Valerie: I would argue with the text when they describe imaginary play as happening only during dramatic play. I think children use their imagination in any area of the classroom. And another thing I would argue with is that children always use their imagination when you look at play in a classroom, not sure why they would find this to otherwise be the case.

Kristen: Children don't use objects for other things in my classroom.

Faith: My children are always pretending to substitute the things we have in the classroom for other things.

PD Facilitator: What parts of the text do you want to aspire to or act upon?

Valerie: I would like to add materials to the art cart or the block area and change it up more often.

Faith: I would like to encourage the use of familiar things in different ways.

Kristen: I'll try that too.

As seen above, Valerie responded to each of the prompts shared by the PD facilitator.

Protocols were also used during the reflection sessions. The protocol used for each reflection session was "Atlas Looking at Data" (National School Reform Faculty, 2012). This protocol prompted the teacher participants to describe what they saw and experienced within

their practices after trying out the assigned tasks after each PD workshop session. For example

in reflection session four when we reflected on what teachers saw and heard in the classrooms

focusing on building opportunities to talk. When asked, "What did you see or hear," the

following conversation took place:

> Valerie: During show & tell one of the children brought in a car which was one of those transformers and I asked, "How do you change the car into something else?" The child showed how the car turned into a dinosaur. When toys like this changes into something else we might say they….. I left time for any answers that the children might have had. I was going for the word transform. I then introduced the word and talked about transformers. I asked if we had any transformers in the classroom. One child said, "Yes, the alphabots." Now the children had a name for these things, different from what they might have called it before.

> Kristen: Our class likes the block area. One of the teachers will always go over and ask the children what they are building.

> Faith: When children are playing with playdough I might say to them, "Yours is bumpy, yours is yellow." This gives the children the opportunity to compare and contrast.

> Valerie: We also did a compare and contrast with the *Very Hungry Caterpillar* and the *Butterfly is Born* books. They both told the life cycle of a butterfly, one is fiction and one is non-fiction so we discussed and used the words, "metamorphous" and said that meant change. We then talked about the word, "proboscis."

Valerie participated because she was prompted by the question in the protocol. Not only did she

answer the question she added an additional example.

The use of protocols throughout the reflective sessions seemed to focus Valerie. She

reported on the activities she completed in her own practice by providing many examples, no

matter what the assigned task was for that PD session.

Assigned tasks. Another structure that seemed to prompt Valerie's participation were the

tasks assigned after each PD workshop. These tasks included identifying strengths and

improvements for literacy enhancements in the classroom environment, identifying the teacher's

role during play, and identifying the conversations and vocabulary building happening during

indoor and outdoor playtime. These tasks were designed to encourage the teachers to assess

what was happening in their classrooms and try some of the ideas we were discussing in the

workshops out in their own practice. As a diligent teacher, when Valerie was asked to try things

out, she did. She always came to the reflection sessions with examples of what she tried out and

was a responsive participant during the reflection sessions. She participated an average of ten

times each session.

Valerie seemed to be the most excited when she talked about the things she added to

enhance the literacy environment in her own classroom and how she attempted to have

meaningful conversations with the children during playtime. After PD session one, the teacher

participants were asked to identify the strengths as well as improvements that could be made to

enhance literacy in their classrooms. The following conversation took place:

> *It is Wednesday afternoon and all three teacher participants arrive at the reflection session the week after PD session one. Valerie is the first to speak and begins by sharing the possibilities for change she saw not only in her classroom, but the other two teacher participants' classrooms as well. Valerie says, "We could make an author wall and add an easel to the kitchen area. You always need writing tools, paper, stickers, and little chalkboards with little erasers. We could put a white board or chalkboard in the housekeeping area. The children could write the specials of the day and other details that relate to what they might be doing. We need a listening center with books and CD's. We could have letters and the children's names on the rugs, walls, tables, and any area of the classroom." After a few minutes the conversation shifts to the different props and Valerie says, "If we can't purchase props, we could exchange things amongst ourselves, which will give the children a new prop to enhance their learning. We don't need to always spend money on a magnet board. We could always use cookie sheets."*

She also wanted to make changes that were associated with the dramatic play area of her

classroom. Her reporting of the changes she would like to make were as follows:

> It would be great for the children if we were to make our dramatic play area something
> different from time to time. We could have a grocery store, a restaurant, a hair salon, or

any other place the children would like it to be. The children could make a sign that will identify the type of store we will have that day. Perhaps during circle time we could talk about the kind of jobs the store for the day will need.

Throughout reflection sessions four and five, Valerie reported on the various times when she attempted to have conversations with the children during playtime. For example, in a reflection session about how she used the strategy of modeling language during playtime, Valerie reported to our group how she encouraged Mark to play in the block area with Ben and Sam:

PD Facilitator: What were the ways you modeled language during playtime?

Kristen: We give the children words to use to help them with conflicts.

Valerie: In my example, Mark walks up to me and says, " I want to play with Ben and Sam in the block area and they won't let me." I say, " Did you ask the boys if you could play?" Mark replies, "They said they were already playing." I take Mark's hand and together we walk over to the block area. I then say to Mark, "You will need to ask Ben and Sam if you could play with them. You could say to them, what are you building? Can I use these blocks?" Mark walks into the block area while I stand nearby and says to Ben and Sam, "What are you building?" Mark waits for their response and looks up at me. Ben then says, "We are building a new city." Mark then says, "Can I use these blocks to help build the city?" I notice Sam moving over and giving some blocks to Mark.

Faith: You need to listen to understand first before you could have children model the language.

In another reflection session focused on expanding a child's thinking, Valerie reported the following conversation she had with several children about their investigation of magnets:

I see Tommy and Jane playing with the magnets, so I walk over and say to them, "Magnets are magical!" Tommy picks up a few paper clips and asks me, "Do these paper clips stick?" I say to Tommy, "Let's try them (they stick) and I turn to Tommy and ask him to find something else that will stick? Jane is holding a pipe cleaner and asks, "What about this pipe cleaner?" I say, "There is metal inside, see, and the metal has iron. Let's see if it sticks." Jane puts the pipe cleaner on the magnet and sure enough it sticks. Tommy brings over a book and says, "What about this book?" I say, "Let's try it." After Tommy, Jane and I try to make the book stick, it does not. I say, why do you think it didn't stick? What is it about magnets that makes them magical?" Both Tommy

and Jane begin to share ideas of why the book does not stick. Tommy says, "It's probably not a magic book." Jane says, "It's too big for the magnet." I take the paper clip and the pipe cleaner and show both Valerie and Tommy the metal on both and we all begin looking for the metal in the book.

As reported by Valerie during this reflection session, " The questions I asked helped the children to learn more about the properties of magnets."

The reflection sessions provided Valerie with an activity that needed to be completed, and as a teacher who completed all work-related tasks these assigned activities were no exception. She always came to the reflection sessions to talk about the things she tried and her thoughts about whether they worked or not. She was no longer the quiet participant, but one that had a great deal to share.

In summary, when there was no clear expectation to participate Valerie was the quietest participant. Without the protocol, questions or prompts as well as the opportunity to try things out she did not say anything. Professional development literature identifies personal characteristics as factors that contribute to a teacher's participation (McLohman, 2006). According to McLohman these factors include initiative, self-efficacy, love of learning, interest in the profession, commitment to professional development, a nurturing personality and an outgoing personality (McLohman, 2006). Valerie is a person who does not appear to have an outgoing personality, which perhaps caused her to be quiet in some of the professional development sessions unless she was deliberately prompted.

Several questions were asked on the "Reflective Response: Teacher-Generated Response Sheet" that were given out after each PD workshop. Valerie's response after PD session one to the question, "What are your next steps?" included the following:

I need to look in my classroom centers to see what ways I can encourage a greater variety of play themes to encourage oral literacy learning. I need to add items to play areas to

encourage literacy such as clipboards and writing utensils. I also need to add books to all areas of my classroom. I need to be mindful of questions and conversations in play and try to find more opportunities to engage with the children and participate in their conversations.

In the next section I describe whether any of these intentions were observed in Valerie's classroom.

Literacy Practices During and After the PD

In the second interview, when Valerie was asked about something she was excited to implement in her classroom she said, "I am excited about joining the children more often in play. I want to ask them more questions and give them different materials to see what they might do with them." When I observed Valerie teaching, there were noticeable changes to the literacy environment. However, I did not observe her using children's play to have meaningful conversations or build vocabulary. What did become evident was how she added writing implements, paper, and props to provide the children with more opportunities for writing. She also tried to spend more time with the children during playtime by limiting the time she spent in small group.

Encouraging writing. It seems that during the PD the notion of adding props to encourage writing and drawing was something that gelled with Valerie as there were noticeable differences in her classroom as compared to when I first observed her practice. Valerie developed children's interest in writing by placing clipboards and markers in several areas of the classroom as well as props to facilitate children's play around particular content. For example in the dramatic play area, Valerie added empty food containers for the children to play with. The addition of clip boards and markers prompted children to write lists and pretend to shop for the items they needed. A phone was added to call in or take orders, and a cash register was added to ring up the sales. A menu from the local pizzeria was part of the new props as well as a few

donated empty pizza boxes. A chalkboard was placed in the entrance of the interest area to

encourage children to write the specials of the day for the restaurant they created. During one of

my observations, the following play was taking place with the added props and materials:

> *Jane is holding a clipboard and marker and says to Charlie, "We need to make a list of*
> *the food we need for our restaurant today." Charlie picks up the menu and says, "We*
> *need sauce, cheese and dough." Jane writes these things on the clipboard. Sam pretends*
> *to make the phone ring and picks the phone up and says, "Hello, can I help you?" After*
> *a few seconds, Sam says, "We have an order for two slices of pizza. They will be here in*
> *five minutes." Jane, Charlie and Sam put together the two slices with paper and markers*
> *and put the slices in the pizza box.*

Adding just a few props and materials encouraged Jane, Charlie and Sam to pretend they were

working at a pizzeria. The children were pretending to read the menu and write the lists of

things they needed for the restaurant. They were also using the paper and markers to make the

pizza slices for the order they received.

During my observations it was evident that Valerie had placed writing materials in the

block area. Pictures of various buildings including buildings that could be seen in and around

the local community were placed at children's eye level. Markers and paper were added for the

children to draw their designs prior to their block building.

Similarly, in the science area, Valerie added paper and markers for children to record

their observational data. She incorporated magnifying glasses and the children were asked to

document their observations. There was a science word wall that included the new vocabulary

they were learning. Words were added that went along with the various themes Valerie was

teaching. One month during the PD initiative the themes included plants and magnets and the

words on the science word wall reflected the new words that were introduced during the teaching

of these themes. These words included the words, "germinate," "roots," "attract," "repel," and

"magnet." Children were able to see the new words in print and practice writing them if they

wanted.

Valerie also encouraged the children to draw and write words seen in figure 19 below.

This picture was created by one of the children during a teacher-led small group activity that

took place during playtime. After a shared book reading the children were asked to draw a

picture of words that rhymed. The picture below, figure 19 shows a picture of a mouse in a

house along with the words written on the lines Valerie drew to encourage the children's writing.

Figure 19. Children's drawing and related words.

Having opportunities for children to explore and experiment with writing helps expose

children to a variety of purposes for writing (Casbergue & Strickland, 2016). While it is

important to provide writing supplies and tools for children, it is also important to provide

children with interesting things to write about, such as writing the lists in the restaurant and

writing observations in the science area.

These enhancements to the literacy environment were reflected in Valerie's post

professional development SELA scores. Her highest scores were on the items related to writing

before and after the PD. Her scores for item number four "having writing materials available

and easy for the children to use" improved from a four to a five due to the addition of writing

materials in the dramatic play area. Valerie's score for item number thirteen, "Teachers promote

children's interest in writing," increased from a three before the PD to a five after the PD.

Trying to spend more time with children during playtime. Not only did Valerie make

changes to her classroom environment to enhance literacy, she attempted to spend more time

with the children during playtime instead of focusing on a small group activity. Each

observation resulted in less time spent on the small group activity and more time for

conversations with children during play.

Once the PD initiative began during the first observation of Valerie's playtime, of

approximately fifty minutes, Valerie spent the majority of the time at a table, working with

several children on a teacher-led activity of writing words on a Mother's Day card. Her assistant

teacher was sitting at a table on the other side of the classroom, with several other children,

working on another teacher-led activity of drawing a picture on the same Mother's Day card the

children were making. The remaining children were in other areas of the classroom such as

dramatic play, blocks, and the writing center. At the table where Valerie was working with

several children, the following was observed:

> *Valerie places two chalkboards on the table, one with the words, "Dear Mom" and the other with the word "Love." Valerie gives each child a piece of folded construction paper with several words already written on it. Valerie first asks the children to copy the words, "Dear Mom" from the chalkboard. Then Valerie says, "Dear Mom, I love you because…" and asks the children why they love their moms. After each child responds, Valerie records what they say. Ben says, "You snuggle with me." Valerie asks, "What else?" and Ben says, "And because you hug me every time in the morning." Valerie says to Ben, "You wrote a lot." She reminds each child to add a period at the end of the sentence. Once the children finish this part of the card, Valerie says, "Now copy the word, 'Love' put a comma, and then write your name." Once each child completes his or her card, Valerie tells each child to put the card in his or her cubby to give to his or her mom on Mother's Day.*

This small group teacher-led activity required Valerie's attention during the entire playtime. As a result, Valerie had no time to use literacy strategies with the children while they were playing in any other area of the classroom.

However, during the next two observations, Valerie attempted to limit her small group activity time. Participating in the PD seemed to contribute to Valerie spending less time focused on the small group activity and more time with the children in the other areas of the classroom during playtime. Valerie expressed during the final interview, "Spending less time in small group during playtime allowed me to have more conversations with the students and more opportunities to listen to what the children are saying."

In a subsequent observation of playtime, Valerie continued to complete a small group activity with the children. This activity lasted about thirty minutes and consisted of making a thank you card for the police officer's visit with the class. Each child came over to the table and drew a picture of what they liked about the visit and Valerie wrote the words to describe what they drew. After everyone completed the teacher-led activity there was still time for Valerie to have conversations with the children during the remainder of the playtime. It was during that time that I found her sitting with a group of children on the large classroom rug. The children and Valerie were playing with community helper cards, which represented various occupations. The following conversation occurred as a student, Charlie, began turning over one of the cards:

> Valerie: This looks like a teacher. Someone who works with boys and girls is a teacher.
> Charlie: What about this one?
> Valerie: This is a police officer.
> Sammy: Turning over another card, Sammy asks, "What does this person do?
> Valerie: He is a plumber. Do you remember when the plumber came to our school?
> Remember there was a leak in our snack room and they came to fix it for us. Sometimes
> the plumber has to cut open the wall to get to the pipes and then they need to fix the wall.
> Sometimes if we have a drip we have to call a plumber. We did have a pipe that was

leaking in our snack room. We did have to call a plumber to fix the leak and he had to cut the ceiling and then fix the leak and then the ceiling.

Sammy: That was a hard job.

Charlie: What about this one?

Valerie: She is a pharmacist, like you would see at CVS or Walgreens.

Charlie: I know this one. He is a dentist.

Valerie: How about this one?

Charlie: I don't know.

Valerie: He is a custodian. They clean our school.

Valerie: Look at this one. He is a veterinarian, a doctor who takes care of pets.

Sammy: My dog was sick and was throwing up all over.

Valerie: Did you have to take him to a veterinarian?

Sammy: No.

This conversation built children's vocabulary by using words such as pharmacist, custodian, and veterinarian. However, rather than being a multi-turn interaction, the format is one Courtney Cazden describes as a three part sequence in which a teacher initiates a comment or question, the student will respond and then the teacher will respond with either an evaluation of the student's response (IRE) or some kind of feedback (IRF), (Cazden, 2001). Valerie asks a questions and gets a response of one word. It is only when Valerie explains what a plumber does that there is a lot more information exchanged from Valerie to the children. But the exchange is not a dialogue. Valerie did not use questioning to seek out children's knowledge about plumbers. In this exchange, Valerie also missed an opportunity to increase Sammy's learning by accepting his one word answer of "no" without asking him to explain why he did not have to take his dog to the veterinarian after his dog was throwing up. This observation is an example of Valerie attempting to have a meaningful conversation with the children; however, Valerie missed the opportunities to have the type of conversation that sparks children's thinking.

During PD workshop session one we discussed adding props to stimulate children's conversation. I was happy to see that Valerie used what she was learning in the PD in her own

classroom practices. For example in the observation on June 1, Valerie set up a playdough table

and said to the children, "I have some interesting things here to add to the playdough. I have

some pipe cleaners and wiggly eyes for you to make a playdough creation." See figure 20

below.

Figure 20. Playdough creation activity.

 Valerie explained in our second interview: "I hoped that the pipe cleaners and wiggly eyes

would change the way the children would play with them and engage them in more

conversations." At the playdough table after she had introduced the pipe cleaners and wiggly

eyes the following conversation occurred:

> Valerie (to Sammy): What are you making?
> Sammy: A monster.
> Valerie asks Jamison: Did you use the pipe cleaners for ears?
> Jamison: Yes.
> Valerie: I wonder what would happen if you put three wiggly eyes or made something
> with two round balls.
> Valerie: Charlie, what are you making?
> Charlie: A ball

As can be seen, the questions Valerie asked elicited mostly one-word responses and one

comment she made for the children to "wonder about" received no response at all. The materials

that Valerie added were done to encourage conversation, however the questions Valerie asked

did not promote meaningful conversation. From my observations her conversations with the

children during playtime remained limited.

Outdoor playtime also showed no changes in the conversations Valerie had with children. As indicated in the observation prior to the PD she did have conversations with children during outdoor playtime, however, these conversations continued throughout the PD to be limited to Valerie asking a question and getting a response and then moving on. For example during observation three the following conversation took place outside:

Charlie: I see a cloud.
Valerie: Look, the wind is moving the clouds.
Charlie: I like to look at clouds.
Valerie: Yes, look at those clouds. I think I see a cloud that looks like a rabbit. What do you see?
Charlie: I see a turtle cloud.
Valerie: I see the turtle cloud too, it's moving slowly.

During the conversation above, Valerie could have enhanced the children's thinking about clouds by asking them questions that would contribute to their understanding of clouds. She might have asked them, "Why do you think clouds have different shapes?" or "Why do you think some clouds move slowly and some fast?"

Similarly during outdoor observation two, Valerie and Ben were at the sand box and the following conversation took place:

Valerie: I wonder how that sand got so wet?
Ben: It's from underneath.
Valerie: What are you making? Do you have a recipe?
Sammy walks over and joins Valerie and Ben: What are you doing?
Ben: Making a sand pile.
Sam: Let's crush it.
Valerie: Oh, you are just going to crush it. You might want to pat it down with the shovel or your hand.

Once again these conversations were limited in enhancing children's thinking. The questions Valerie asked were not ones that built upon what the child said. When Ben stated, "It's from underneath", Valerie could have expanded upon Ben's statement by asking another question

about the sand, such as, "How do you know it's from underneath?" or "What do you think makes the sand wet?" Instead she went to another a child and asked them what they were making. Valerie was having a conversation with the children, however, the responses if any were received were limited to short answers, due to the type of questions Valerie was asking and the statements she made.

In summary, Valerie made an effort to have more conversations with children during playtime there was a slight increase in the SELA scores from a three to a four for item number six, which states, "In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept development." However, the more extensive conversations that Valerie had with children continued to be mostly during teacher-led activities such as large or small group time.

Summary

Valerie was willing to listen and always did what was expected of her throughout the PD. Her following of expectations meant that Valerie did try things out and she did make slight changes to her practice. These changes were in enhancing literacy in the environment mostly by providing writing opportunities and children's interest in writing, and interacting more with children during playtime. Valerie's SELA scores increased by seven points after the PD, see table 8. These increases occurred mostly because of the increase of props and materials in the literacy environment especially writing materials. Increases in the SELA ratings were also evident in the introduction of new words and concepts, book readings that lead to building children's language, knowledge, and love of books, in addition to helping children identify the sounds they hear in words.

Table 8

Valerie's SELA Rating before and after the PD

Item #	Item	Rating Prior to PD	Rating After the PD
Valerie's SELA Ratings Before and After the PD			
1	Print is used in the environment for a purpose	4	4
2	There is an inviting place where children can look at books	4	2
3	The environment promotes interest in a wide variety of books	2	2
4	Writing materials are available and easy for children to use	4	5
5	A variety of literacy items and props are used in the pretend play area	3	5
6	In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept	3	4
7	Teachers speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts, and linguistic structures	3	5
8	Organizing activities that promote language development	3	4
9	Teachers read books to children in ways that build language, knowledge, and love of books	3	5
10	Calling attention to the functions and features of print	5	4
11	Drawing children's attention to the sounds they hear in words	3	5
12	Teachers help children recognize letters	5	5
13	Teachers promote children's interest in writing	3	5

16	Activities and materials are age appropriate	5	3
17	Children can choose from a variety of developmentally appropriate materials	3	3
18	Teachers show warmth, interest, and acceptance toward children	5	5
19	Teachers promote positive interactions among children	4	5
	Total Score	**64**	**71**

As much as Valerie reported wanting to change the conversations she had with children, during the times I observed, there were no multi-turn taking conversations and few opportunities during play that were used to extend children's language.

Making changes in the environment are easier to make, since it requires adding physical props or materials. Making changes in the quality of conversations with children and using playtime as an instructional event is a result of changing how a teacher teaches. This kind of change is harder since how a teacher teaches is a result of beliefs and prior practice. In keeping with the research on professional development (Hindman & Wasik, 2008; 2012; Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2006; Wasik & Hindman, 2011) making these deeper changes in teacher practices takes time. Thus, while Valerie made some slight changes to her practices, she remained committed to her belief that literacy teaching happens best through teacher-led activities.

Faith: Deepening her Understanding of Early Literacy

Faith, the youngest of the three teacher participants, had the least experience teaching preschool. She had previously been a middle school teacher and had only taught preschool for three years. This lack of experience impacted Faith's confidence in her ability as a preschool

teacher, so she often questioned her pedagogical approach and classroom practices. When Faith felt unsure, she did not hesitate to ask for help from other teachers, her assistant teacher, or the director of the school. She remained open-minded and frequently made changes to her teaching practices based on the suggestions provided.

Throughout the PD, Faith was eager to learn and enthusiastic about applying new teaching strategies and techniques within her own classroom. In what follows I will detail the changes that Faith made to her literacy practices during her participation in the PD. To give the reader a sense of Faith as a teacher, I will begin by outlining her initial beliefs and practices regarding teaching language and literacy at the preschool level, as well as the contribution of play to literacy. I will then take the reader into Faith's classroom and describe her practices during and after the PD.

Beliefs and Practices Before the Professional Development Initiative

Faith believes that preschool is a time when children develop skills in a variety of areas. During the first interview she said:

> I'm amazed at how much the children learn at this level. Pre-K is such an emergent field, not just for providing children with the academics they need, but it is also a lot about life skills, such as being able to pour at snack time. It is also about social skills, including manners and values in addition to how to treat each other. As far as academics, children learn alphabet recognition and some of them even learn how to read and write. Children learn numbers, and we do so much in science and social studies as well.

Preschool, for Faith, is more than academics. Children also need to learn to be independent as well as how to get along with each other.

In keeping with developmentally appropriate practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006) Faith believes each child is different and needs to be challenged at his or her existing developmental level to acquire the next level of a skill, knowledge, or behavior. Faith said

during the interview, "Every child is at a different developmental stage and we need to help each

child individually where they are at by providing appropriate activities in the classroom for

them." She focuses on the individual strengths, needs, and interests of each child. Faith explains

how she provides individual instruction as follows:

> In order to help each child with what they need I meet one on one or in small groups with the children during playtime. This gives me a chance to help each child with what they need, rather than teach the whole class. I help them mostly with their writing of letters as well as using scissors and understanding concepts such as those in math and science.

In order for learning to happen, Faith believes, "First you need to make children feel safe

by creating a loving and nurturing environment." Faith believes that when children's basic needs

are not met, especially when they are hungry, scared, not loved, and respected it is difficult for

them to focus on learning. That is why Faith begins by creating a trusting and loving

relationship with the children in her class. During Faith's evaluation process in the spring of

2016 she described her teaching and learning process as follows:

> I attempt to really get to know my children, their needs and interests. I visit with them during free play, outside play and circle time every day. I believe this teacher interaction provides the children with a sense of security and promotes a happy, caring and trusting environment.

Beliefs about literacy. Faith's responses to questions about her literacy beliefs offered

very little, if any, explanation. This response may be due, in part, to her background. Faith is

not certified as a pre-K teacher and most of her prior teaching experience has been in middle

school math and science. Despite her limited background in literacy, Faith believes that certain

literacy skills need to be developed during the preschool years. From Faith's perspective "In

today's world preschool makes a difference to the literacy skills young children need." The

literacy skills that Faith believes need to be developed include:

Left to right progression to teach print concepts is one of the biggest things they need to learn so they could read. They need to understand that you read from left to right. Besides this, they need to learn the letters of the alphabet and that the letters make words and words make sentences.

Faith believes that teaching vocabulary is also important during the preschool years.

Vocabulary is important to use in conversations. It becomes necessary to understand the meaning of words when children are exposed to new words while they are reading and writing in school. Preschoolers learn vocabulary when they come across a new word when we are reading. They want to know what the word means, so it's important.

Faith says, "Exposing children to words in various ways will help children build their vocabulary and, therefore, become better readers."

Faith believes that oral language develops when children talk. Children have conversations most often when they first come into Faith's classroom, as she explains:

The children haven't seen each other for a while. Especially after the weekend, they want to talk. They have so much to say to each other. We have to give them the opportunity to talk. Otherwise, they will not sit and focus on the lesson.

Faith believes that talking is a way for preschoolers to develop their oral language skills. In the first interview with Faith she mentioned what she tells parents at back-to-school night, "We need to give children opportunities to talk. Talking is the key to everything and we need to listen to them." Faith added, "I mostly listen to the children when they talk to each other. This helps me better understand where each child is regarding their oral language development."

Beliefs about play. During playtime, Faith reported, "Children move freely around the classroom centers, playing and socializing with the other children." It is this social interaction that Faith believes allows children to learn from their peers through conversations. She explained:

During playtime, children have more freedom. They know they can talk. They learn a lot from the conversations they have with each other and their teachers. Playtime gives

children a time to use their language skills. The children with the higher-level skills help those with the lower level skills. Playtime is for giving children a time to use their language skills.

Despite her valuing children's play, Faith saw playtime as an opportunity to focus on skill development. Throughout the first interview when the questions focused on Faith's beliefs about play, she described specific lessons she taught.

> We did a lesson about rainbows, colors, and the order of the colors in the rainbow. The children put the yarn in the correct color order. They said the colors as they did. We also learned about the color green. We listed things that started with the letter "G" and the children had lots of opportunities to talk.

While Faith viewed play as another space where she could help children develop their literacy skills, she seemed unaware that giving children the opportunity to explore their own ideas with each other allows children to take ownership of their learning and fosters the ability to apply their learning in different situations (Gronlund, 2010). When children have the opportunity to play they expand their oral language skills. During their play they talk and share ideas with each other. They assign roles in their play, learn how to problem solve, and be creative thinkers as they learn about the world around them.

Faith's practices prior to the professional development. For Faith, teaching is giving information to children through teacher-led activities. Therefore, the classroom environment and the teaching strategies Faith employed throughout the day during playtime emphasized teaching academic content, such as colors and letters. She does this by establishing a classroom environment where the majority of the space is allocated to large group times, limiting the space designated for child-initiated areas. Faith's teaching practices are completed through teacher-led activities during all components of her day including small group time implemented during playtime.

Classroom environment. Faith has the smallest classroom at CPNS and finds it

challenging to provide enough activities to engage the children within her limited classroom

space. The classroom's physical environment of just 473 square feet is organized to enable Faith

to teach large group activities and also be able to meet one-on-one with children.

A key large group area in Faith's classroom is the rug where children sit when Faith is

reading a story to the class, providing the children with a lesson, having show & tell, as well as

the class welcome time. Another large group area includes the snack and craft tables. This area

is where the children and teachers sit together to have snack as well as complete any large group

activity that includes all of the children in the class. These large group areas take up almost half

of the classroom space (see Figure 21).

Children are able to move freely around the classroom during playtime, however, the

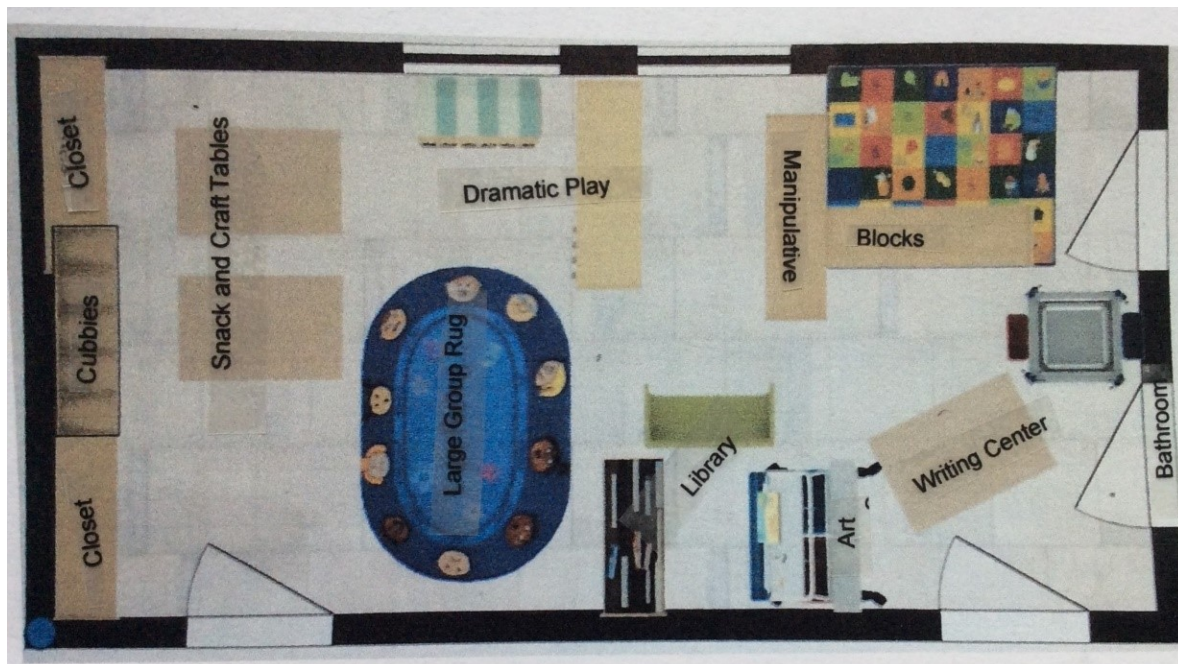space for child-initiated activities such as block building and dramatic play activities is limited.

Figure 21. Faith's classroom environment prior to the PD intervention.

During the observation prior to the PD intervention the child-initiated spaces lacked

props to encourage conversation. For example, the block area consisted of only a variety of

wooden blocks. There were no signs with words to encourage writing. There were no writing

materials or props, such as people or animals, which would enhance the children's play and

encourage conversations. While Faith's dramatic play area consisted of some props that might

encourage oral language such as a combination stove, sink, refrigerator and a grocery store (see

figure 22 below) children were not seen playing in this area. The literacy props were limited

and included a cash register and all types of vegetables along with an "Open and Closed" sign.

While the props, such as fruits and vegetables, could catalyze talk about what to buy or cook,

there were no writing materials in this area and limited environmental print for the children to

make connections to as they played. The only words displayed were the word "closed" on the

closed sign and "grocery store" on the store banner.

Figure 22. Grocery store prior to the PD.

The library (see figure 23, library prior to the PD) is another child-initiated area of Faith's

classroom. This area had books, however, there were no props and materials seen that would

encourage conversation. For item number three on the SELA: "The environment promotes

interest in a wide variety of books" (Smith et al., 2001), Faith received a score of two. Faith's

library area lacks at least three different categories of books and did not reflect the twenty

percent of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of people that SELA identifies as the

appropriate percentage to support children's literacy development (Smith et al., 2001). At least

ten books were displayed and within children's reach. This SELA observation item number two:

"There is an inviting place where children can look at books" (Smith et al., 2001), gave Faith a

SELA score of three, which is in the middle of low quality and best practices. Beneath the

display of books, small wipe off boards with markers and chalkboards with chalk were available

for children to use for writing. Since the library provided another area for writing, for item

number four in the SELA: "Writing materials are available and easy for children to use" (Smith

et al., 2001), Faith received a score of three.

Figure 23. Library area prior to the PD.

Posters can be found displayed on the walls in various areas of Faith's classroom. These

posters include pictures of shapes, the alphabet, both upper and lower-case letters, and colors that

have pictures depicting each color along with the written word (see figure 24, posters prior to the

PD). Hung at the children's eye level, each poster has words, letters, or labels, and helps

children learn new information and concepts; however, the posters lack the meaningful print

necessary to promote higher-level communication (Heroman & Jones, 2010). These posters just

take up space on the walls; although, the chart of the alphabet does provide a model for the

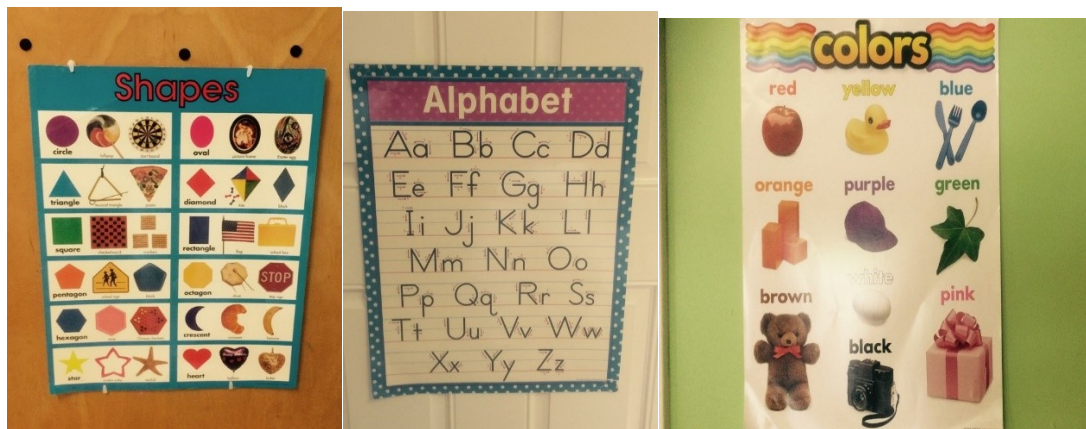children to use and could be helpful if writing implements were available.

Figure 24. Posters prior to the PD.

Faith's classroom lacked the literacy rich environment where children could use print for

a purpose. Because of the lack of props and books in the child initiated areas as well as the lack

of writing materials overall, Faith scored low on the SELA when the focus was on the literacy

environment.

Teacher directed classroom discourse. Classroom discourse is the language that

teachers and children use in their communication during the learning process (Cazden, 2001).

Faith believed that talk was important. However, the talk she used with the children for learning

was mostly done during the teacher led activities or for managerial purposes.

Faith uses various teacher-led activities such as show & tell and large group time to

engage children in conversations. These conversations are started through the questions Faith

asks. In her words, "Oral language is developed when I ask the children questions during large

group time. I might also ask them to share something." She continued, "I might ask the children

what they did over the weekend, or what they had for dinner last night." During an observation

prior to the PD intervention the following conversation took place during large group time:

> Faith: Did anyone get to go to a baseball game last night?
> Charlie: We went to my sister's and I got to play with my friends.
> Gianna: My dad was watching a baseball game on TV.
> Savannah: I don't know how to play baseball.
> Faith: That's okay, not everyone knows how to play baseball. Who is our helper today? Let's get started with our jobs.

Although Faith asked the children questions to get them to talk, for Faith, this conversation was limited to short answers. She did not encourage the extension of any of the children's responses. Instead Faith ended the conversation quickly and continued with the next activity of completing the jobs of the day.

Faith also uses large group time to teach vocabulary words linked to the theme she is teaching. Faith said, "The children want to learn new words. When they come across a new word in a book or in their play they want to know what it means."   She described how she teaches new vocabulary as follows:

> I have words for every theme I teach. We first go over the meaning and the letters in the words. I try hard to engage the children in learning the new words. I do a visual, like show a picture, then go over each letter for letter recognition. We talk about the meaning of the word and then I have the children write the word on the white board or chalkboards if they can.

Prior to the PD intervention, during a large group shared reading time with all of the children present, I observed Faith teaching new vocabulary words to the children. The words she was teaching were words that they read in the book, *I Took a Walk*, by Henry Cole. After taking a walk outside this book was read to the children and the following happened:

> *Faith, takes out her experience chart and places it in front of the children who are sitting on the large group rug to write down a few words that were in the book. She writes the word, "stream" and "meadow." She asks the children if they know what a stream is? There is no answer from the children so she explains that a stream is a body of water that is usually small in size. Faith says, "Did we see one on our walk?" The children shout, "yes." Faith says "stream" and then says the letters in the word one by one, S T R E A M. Faith then writes the word "meadow" and tells the children a meadow is a large*

> *open area of grass. She asks the children if they saw a meadow? Many children said*
> *they saw grass and Faith says, "It needs to be a big area of grass for it to be a meadow*
> *and we only saw small areas of grass."*

In this vignette Faith teaches children new vocabulary words such as "stream" and "meadow."

She was able to connect the new vocabulary words to the children's experience during their walk

outside. She then talked about the meaning of the words, however, Faith's description of the

word "meadow" needed more explanation and left the children without an understanding of the

word. It would have helped if she had taken out the book again and showed the children the

picture of a meadow and had other pictures of what a meadow looks like. This would have given

the children more context to learn the word.

In addition to asking children general questions and teaching vocabulary during large

group times, Faith stated that the "biggest" thing she does for oral language development is

having show & tell. It is so important to Faith that she has a show & tell scheduled every day for

every child to have a turn each week. She explains how this instructional event helps children

develop oral language skills:

> Children are asked to bring in an object or an item that is special to them that they could
> talk about. Occasionally, a child doesn't bring something in. They just tell about it.
> Giving children the opportunity to talk is important. During show & tell we are teaching
> children to speak, however, we are also teaching them how to ask questions. We teach
> them the words, "how", "what", "where", and "when" when we use the different levels of
> questioning.

According to Faith, "Show & Tell is the children's favorite thing, at least that's what the parents

tell me. Some parents tell me the children even practice this at home." Prior to the PD

intervention, I observed Faith's show & tell time where all the children in the class were sitting

on the large group rug in a circle. The following took place:

> Faith: Gianna, what did you bring in?
> Gianna: Holding a plate with sand she says, "Sand from my vacation."

Faith: Gianna will hold the plate and you will be able to put your fingers in it. Tell us how it feels Daniel.

Daniel: It feels smooth. That's what I felt.

Faith: Was it easy to build a sand castle with this sand?

Gianna: No.

Faith: Is it different than the sand at the Jersey shore?   How does it feel?

Savannah: It feels silky.

Faith: Let's look at the sea glass that Gianna also brought in to show us. This is a big piece. Let's pass this one around. Is it hard or soft? Is it smooth or rough?

Charlie and George shout out together: It's hard and smooth.

Faith: Thank you for bringing in your treasures Gianna. Gianna pick the next friend. Rian, remember everyone gets a turn. Who is your friend Rian?

Rian: Darth Vader

Faith: Is he a bad guy or a good guy? From what movie?

Rian: Star Wars

Faith: What do you like about him?

Rian: I don't know. I have two others at home.

Faith: Darth Vader or other characters?

Rian: Yes.

Faith: Which ones?

Rian: Storm Troopers.

Faith: Who is your favorite?

Rian: Tie Fighter.

Faith: That was the biggest Darth Vader I have ever seen. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your show & tell?

Rian: No.

Faith: Okay, the last person to share their show & tell today is Alastar. Remember, we call the last person the grand finale. Remember we said that would be the end of our show & tell for the day. Alastar, what did you bring today?

Alastar: I brought my motorcycle that I got.

Faith: What can you tell us about the motorcycle?

Alastar: It's a hot wheels and it always falls down.

Faith: How do you play with it? Will you show us?

Alastar: Yes.

Faith: Can you tell me what colors can you see?

Alastar: Blue, yellow and black.

Faith: Do your wheels move?

Alastar: Yes

Faith: Will it work in the water? In the sand?

Alastar: Yes.

Faith: You could try it. What's the best place to ride your motorcycle - on the carpet or floor?

Alastar: The carpet, I think.

Faith: Try it at home and let us know.

In the above conversation, Faith asked a total of twenty-two questions, however, the questions Faith asked were limited to one-word or short answer responses and as a result, there was not a lot of conversation between and among children. In doing so, Faith missed opportunities to extend the children's thinking about the sand from Gianna's vacation, and how the motorcycle that Alastar brought in worked. She also missed an opportunity to come up with ideas about what would happen to the motorcycle when Alastar tried moving the wheels in water or sand. Faith could have also had Alastar show how the motorcycle worked on the carpet and the floor. After Alastar tried these things, Faith could have had a discussion with the children about what was happening with the wheels and why the motorcycle wheels did or did not move. This type of discourse would have given the children the opportunity to expand their knowledge rather than just answering the questions with one word or short answers. Meaningful conversations such as this have an impact on children's learning (Girolmaetto & Weitzman, 2002; Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Kontos, & Wilcox-Herzog,1997; Massey et al., 2007; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006).

Faith was not observed interreacting with the children in the child centered areas of the classroom, such as the block area or dramatic play during playtime. Instead, Faith used playtime to complete teacher-led activities with her or her assistant working with the children in small groups. Only after the children completed the teacher-led activities were they allowed to play. For Faith, knowing when to participate in children's play is still something she is not comfortable with doing, therefore, she does not use it as a time for teaching. She explains, "I

know that it's important to play with children, however, I still feel uncomfortable interrupting

their play. I just don't know when to participate and when not to."

To give a better sense of what happens during playtime, Faith described her indoor

playtime as follows:

> We have six or seven different centers. The children are allowed to walk around during
> free play and move from center to center. I usually work with each child one on one with
> letters. I do a small group instruction during playtime and I meet with every child each
> week. Some days the children don't want to write. They just want to play. We also
> work on scissor skills and reinforce writing. We have puzzles and games such as Candy
> Land, Don't Break the Ice, Bingo, and Shape Matching. We read stories, do letter
> writing, sometimes painting and we have a sand and water table.

During the observation prior to the PD, the small group activity was to complete a class story

related to their outdoor walk. While other children were playing Faith gathered several children

in a small group and asked each child what they saw, heard, or experienced on their walk. Faith

wrote what they said on an experience chart in front of the children. Once every child had a

chance to share, Faith hung the experience chart with the children's responses in the hallway for

the parents to see. Once this activity was completed the children were allowed to play in the

different areas of the classroom. Faith's focus during playtime was not on the children while

they were playing but on the recall activity. This limited the conversations and learning that

could have happened during playtime.

Similarly, on another day Faith worked with children individually to complete a

questionnaire about each child's mother. The following was observed:

> *Faith calls Charlie over to the table and says, "I'm going to ask you some questions*
> *about your Mom. I would be happy to write them for you if you need me to." Charlie*
> *says, "Okay." Faith says, "Charlie, how old is your Mom?" Charlie, responds, "Ten."*
> *Faith then says, "What does your Mom likes to make?" Charlie responds, "Cookies."*
> *Faith says next, "When is your Mom funny?" and Charlie responds, "When she is*
> *driving in the car." As soon as the questions are answered Faith says, "Now draw a*

picture of you and your mom and your card will be ready to give to her on Mother's Day."

This activity provided opportunities for some limited conversation between Faith and the children but the emphasis seemed to be more on getting the activity done.

When Faith had completed whatever the activity was for the day, she then interacted with children in one of the child-initiated spaces, such as the block area. However, again Faith's conversations with children were limited, and focused mostly on managing behaviors. Faith mentioned, "Sometimes I just sit by the block area. It gets crowded and I want to make sure no one gets hurt." During an observation prior to the PD, I observed Faith sitting on the floor with several children putting together a large puzzle. Her comments to the children consisted of directives, such as, "Can you move those things closer to the puzzle?   It would be easier for you to help if you sit on this side." When Faith was in the block area and when working on puzzles she mostly uses directives to manage behaviors limiting the possibility of having meaningful conversations with children. The conversation Faith had with the children is consistent with the research of Smith & Dickinson (1994) that shows that the conversations teachers have with children consist of mostly directives and managing behaviors.

Sometimes Faith made an effort to engage in a more conversational style with the children. Prior to her sitting at a table with playdough along with cookie cutters and small rolling pins I observed the following:

> *Playtime begins with Faith sitting on the floor with several children playing in the block area. Faith, holding up a block, asks Rian, "What shape is this block?" Rian answers, "It's a square." She then picks up another block and asks Savannah, "What shape is this block?" Savannah replies, "It's a rectangle." Faith moves slightly over and says to Charlie, "What are you making?" Charlie replies, "A city." Faith then moves onto the children playing with the dolls. One of the girls recently had a baby brother and one of the other girls has a mother that is a delivery nurse. The three girls were talking together about popping the babies out. Faith walks over to the three girls and says, "Babies need*

a lot of love and care." Faith takes one of the babies from Gianna and puts the baby in the cradle and covers the baby and begins to sing "Lula bye and good night "and says to the girls, "When the baby wakes up she is going to want to eat. You might want to see what you have and get it ready for when she wakes up." Faith then moves onto the playdough area where she sits with the children and talks to them about the local ice cream shop and the ice cream flavors that everyone likes.

Here, Faith asks questions that limit children's answers to simply recalling a concept or stating a fact. She does not allow time for children to respond to her comments. She does not give the children time to think about what she says before commenting again or leaving the play. As a result, the children simply responded to each question with one word or short answers.

In summary, the physical classroom environment that Faith established lacked literacy-enriched opportunities to engage children in conversation. Faith used playtime as a time for teacher led activities, which limited the time she had for conversations with the children. When she had the time, the conversations consisted of directives, managing behaviors, and questions that limited the children's responses to one-word or short answers.

Due to Faith's lack of experience at the preschool level, I hoped that participating in this PD would help her learn strategies to increase oral language and vocabulary building during playtime in her preschool classroom. The next section will describe how Faith engaged and participated in the PD and reflective sessions.

Engagement in the Professional Development

Faith arrived to the workshops and reflection sessions prepared and ready to participate. This was difficult for her because she was dealing with a few personal issues, including her son's severe allergies and her mother's death during the time of our PD intervention. However, no matter what obstacles Faith faced, she was enthusiastic about participating in the PD and willing to learn.

Faith's willingness to learn during the PD initiative was evident by the way she kept making connections between the PD and her own classroom practice. She made these connections in two ways. First, during every workshop and or reflection session Faith asked questions and explicitly talked about key ideas. Second, the connections Faith made were evident in the way she reported how she was making changes and trying things out in her own classroom practice.

Engaging with the PD content. Faith was the teacher participant that seemed to be the most engaged. In comparison to the other two teacher participants, Faith was the teacher participant that always had the most suggestions and ideas to contribute. For example, during session three when I asked the group, "What do you do to help children's play reach a higher level?" the following conversation occurred:

> Faith: Just adding props helps, for example if you talk about traveling to other countries, just adding a passport might get the play to the next level.

> Valerie: While the children are playing I might ask them, "I wonder what would happen if.…..?" If no one answers I would just walk away.

> Faith: If no one wonders with you, perhaps you could just begin playing and then see what happens.

> Kristen: I would ask a question like in our kitchen area and the children have tons of stuff on the table, I'll go over and ask what is going on here?

> Faith: When there are a lot of things on the table or floor, you could walk over and ask the children what they might do with something, for example you could say to them as you pick up a carrot, "What can we do with this carrot?"

> Faith: You could even add props when you go outside depending on what you are talking about in the classroom.

Faith not only spoke more times than Kristen and Valerie in the above conversation, the content of what she said added to the learning of all three teacher participants. Faith provided a

suggestion to Valerie of what she could do when the children do not "wonder" with her. She

also made a suggestion to Kristen about what she could do when the children have a lot of things

out. In addition, Faith provided examples of actual things that can be done to bring play to a

higher level.

Similarly, during PD workshop session three the teacher participants engaged in an

activity that consisted of a description of a play scenario in a preschool classroom and what the

teacher in the scenario needed to do to bring the play to a higher level. The description indicated

that the children did not seem to know what to do with the materials in the pretend grocery store.

The following conversation took place:

> Valerie: The teacher should add cookbooks and menus to the grocery store.

> Faith: Yes, and they could set up a café, like the one in McCaffrey's.

> Valerie: Baskets and brown bags could be added.

> Kristen: Bags didn't work for our class. The children just put everything in them.

> Faith: I would begin by engaging them in making a shopping list of the things they would need to buy from the food store. They could put those items in the bags. Together we would discuss the roles children could have. This would be the teacher leading the discussion. We would talk about giving everyone the opportunity to have a turn playing the different roles. They might even like the new role. They won't know until they try it. I would, or the teacher in this scenario would, guide the children in playing it through. We could then branch out to have a different kind of store and have specials of the day. We always have coffee shop in my class.

> Valerie: The teacher could add posters on the wall with the pictures and words to help them write the shopping list.

During the above conversation Faith contributed ten ideas of how the teacher in the scenario

could bring play to a higher level in comparison to Valerie's four ideas of what to add to the

grocery store and Kristen's comment about why something did not work in her classroom. As

described above Faith's contributions include working with the children to make a shopping list,

actually buying the food, and packing it up. In addition, Faith shared the idea of having a different kind of store and adding specials of the day.

Faith's engagement in the PD was also evident in the questions she asked. Faith often asked questions to clarify her understanding of the concepts and strategies being discussed. These questions were not to challenge the idea, but to deepen her understanding. Some workshop sessions Faith asked more clarification questions than others, however, the average number of questions that Faith asked was five during the workshop sessions. Faith's average number of questions was much more than Kristen and Valerie who asked only a few questions during each session.

Research identifies the role of a teacher as a "player" when the teacher is interacting with the children during play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). Knowing when to enter and exit play is a difficult concept for teachers to grasp (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Morrow, Roskos & Gambrell, 2016). Faith was no different and she seemed to struggle the most with what she should be doing when children were playing. This topic was introduced in a reading during PD workshop session one. During the discussion of the article by Bodrova and Leong, (2003) Faith said the following:

> The article describes the benefits of teachers interacting with children while they are playing. For me intervening with the children during playtime is hard. When should I intervene?

When the topic was revisited in session three, Faith continued to have many questions. She asked eight questions compared to Valerie's three and Kristen's two. Faith's questions consisted of the following:

> As a teacher, what role do I really have in the children's play?
> When I enter the children's play won't I interrupt what they are doing?
> How will I know if I interrupted the children's play?

> Would I then be controlling the play?
> As the facilitator of play what do I do?
> How do I just be the facilitator of the play?
> How will I have enough time to observe play if I'm working with the children in small groups?
> Even knowing when to enter and exit the play how can I as the teacher successfully do this?

The questions Faith was asking was whether teachers have the right to intervene in children's play and if so what to do when involved in children's play. These questions indicate that Faith was seriously considering if she, as an educator, should play with children.

Similarly, during PD workshops four and five Faith asked questions about when she should have meaningful conversations with the children during playtime. During PD workshop session four Faith asked six questions and during session five she asked five. Although the topic was about the kinds of questions to ask such as ones to build opportunities to talk, modeling conversations, and using complex language and vocabulary, Faith was more focused on when to have these conversations with children during playtime.

For example, during session four, one question Faith asked was, "How can we have a multi-turn conversation with the children while they are playing with the other children and really do not want to talk to the teacher?" During session five, Faith shared the following:

> When I model conversations with the children when they are playing I do not always feel like the children are listening to me. I think they know what they want to do, not what I want them to do. What can I do to help them listen to me and understand what I am asking them to say?

In summary, Faith was the most engaged in every workshop session because she was always keen to participate, asked important questions indicating she had read the materials provided, and offered her ideas on the content.

Making connections to classroom practice. Whether Faith was making a suggestion, sharing an idea, clarifying her understanding of the concepts, or wanting a better understanding of what she read, Faith always thought out loud about how she could use the content in her own practice. But she not only thought out loud, she also reported on the connections she was making between the PD content and her own practice by trying out ideas in her classroom.

One of the most evident connections that Faith seemed to make was how she could add props and materials to enhance the literacy environment. For example, during PD workshop session one the teacher participants were given a worksheet with an example of a preschool classroom. Participants were asked to transform the example of the classroom to support greater literacy learning. The following conversation occurred between the three teacher participants with Faith leading the discussion:

> Faith: One thing that is missing is something for the children to write on. I really think there should be a chalkboard, I like the little erasers that I saw at Lakeshore.

> Valerie: We should add markers and paper as well.

> Faith: We could put chalkboards in the dramatic play area in addition to the library and writing area.

> Kristen: I think the kitchen area is good and has a great deal of literacy.

> Faith: It would be nice to have a listening center, however, my room is so small, I'm not sure where I could put it.

> Valerie: We could add a rug that has letters on it.

> Kristen: If we did that the children would always argue about where to sit.

> Faith: We should add books to all areas of the classroom. The children in my class enjoy the block area and dramatic play this year. We could also add pictures of things that are related to the theme we are studying.

Kristen: The children do not use the books in the block area. The books always get destroyed when I put them there.

Faith: Then, we could add props in the block area. That might help the children play in different ways.

During this conversation Faith not only had the most to contribute regarding how to enhance the literacy environment in the classroom example, she also identified items she could add to enhance the literacy environment in her own classroom. In comparison, Valerie shared a few items that could be added to the classroom example, making no connection to her own practice, and Kristen talked about why the things added would not work. Attesting to her desire to make some changes in her classroom, Faith wrote in her teacher response sheet completed at the end of workshop one, "I would like to provide more props to foster literacy learning especially in the block and kitchen area, which for this year are the most popular areas in my room." Similarly, during workshop session three Faith where we discussed how to bring play to a higher level from a scripted scenario, Faith once again talked about the props and materials she could add to her own classroom in order to encourage play:

I could make the grocery store in my classroom into a lemonade stand and an ice cream store. The children will love those kinds of stores. It's more about planning for the play. Making the grocery store into different places creates a lot more conversation amongst the children.

Another area where Faith made some connections between workshop content and her own practice was in having conversations with children. During PD workshop session four after viewing the video about building opportunities to talk Faith said:

The teacher in the video builds on what she hears. She was able to keep the conversation meaningful and the teacher added a book to read that reflected the children's interest. When the children in our class have snack, I find it's a great time for conversation. When we have teddy grahams, the children count them. One child might say they have twelve

and another might say they have nineteen. I also know what they don't eat at home. The children always have a lot to say.

Session four also gave Faith ideas about how she could connect this content to her own classroom. Faith responded in the "Teacher-Generated Response Sheet, "I would like to remember to ask more open-ended questions to encourage conversation during playtime. I would also like to provide additional activities so the children have more opportunities to talk with each other." Faith reported wanting to encourage conversations and be mindful of the kinds of questions she asks the children. She said, "I'm listening more to what the children are saying. This professional development made me more aware of listening to the children to encourage conversations during playtime."

Faith not only made verbal connections between workshop content and her classroom practice but also reported trying out several of the ideas. After each PD workshop the teachers were assigned an activity application to complete. I could always rely on Faith to come back to each reflection session and report back on the things she did. After the first PD workshop the teacher participants were assigned an activity to visit the other teacher participants' classrooms and identify the strengths and improvements in the literacy-rich play environments. During the reflection session Faith described her feelings and findings as follows:

> I really liked having the opportunity to visit the other classrooms. Having a different set of eyes and seeing things that others might not see was helpful. I got many new ideas and saw things that would really work in my classroom. I liked the binder books, especially the one with the landmarks in Cranbury. The books the children made were great. I noticed another teacher using a sign in for the children to complete when they enter the classroom. My children are ready to write their names and I would like to begin having them sign in as well. I also liked the author of the month I saw in Valerie's classroom. My first thought was that I didn't think we have much literacy, but I saw a lot of things when I focused on it.

The opportunity to visit the other classrooms provided Faith with another perspective on how to set the environment up for literacy learning.

In keeping with her interest in cultivating more classroom conversations, Faith shared what she did to build opportunities to talk with the children in reflection session four. She explained, "The children were playing with playdough. I wanted to work with the children to make comparisons between the shape, size, and color of the playdough they were working with." She reported on how she built opportunities to talk by asking the children questions and making statements, such as, "Your playdough is bumpy, mine is smooth. Who has the biggest piece of playdough? What color do you have? I wonder what would happen if we mixed two colors?" Faith's curiosity about children's talk led her to recording her own class snack time after viewing the video about building opportunities to talk in PD workshop session four. I offered to lend her my recorder and Faith said, "I could do it this afternoon." When we met for the reflection session one week later Faith reported, "It was helpful to step back from what you are doing to reflect." Faith then described what she heard when she listened to her recording:

> There was a lot of conversation going on and I did not realize everyone was talking at once. The tables were close together and the recorder picked up the conversation from both tables. I enjoyed listening to the children's conversations. It made me laugh. They were all excited and then all of a sudden it got very quiet. They must have been eating. Then one child said, "Knock, Knock" and everyone started telling jokes. The children were laughing and the teachers were too. I then asked the children about what they had for lunch. They are learning to take turns when talking. They are always excited to talk and they want to be heard. Sometimes they are all talking at once.

For Faith, this recording sparked an interest in listening as a strategy she could use in her classroom as she explains:

> During snack time, when you listen there were a lot of conversations and jokes the children shared. My assistant teacher and I asked questions about what they had for lunch and what they wanted to play with. When you listen to the children, they really seem to enjoy talking to each other.

In summary, Faith made more connections from the PD to her own practices than the other two teacher participants. As faith told me in her second interview:

> I learned a lot about my own teaching. I had the opportunity to reflect on the activities that I provide to the children and learned ways that I can improve upon my own classroom practices. I was able to look at what I already had in my classroom to make changes and think about things that could be added.

Faith's enthusiasm to implement some of the literacy strategies we discussed became evident in the observations during and after the PD intervention.

Faith's Literacy Practices During and After the Intervention

I hoped that this PD initiative would provide Faith with literacy strategies she could use during playtime. It seems that her eagerness was not just to learn, she actually took several key ideas away from the PD. Even though she continued to use playtime as a time for teacher led activities, those activities took up less and less of her time during the allotted time for children's play. This additional time gave her the opportunity to focus more on the use of teacher talk during both indoor and outdoor playtime. Faith also enhanced the literacy in her classroom environment through the addition of props and materials as well as the addition of various writing implements.

Enhancing the literacy environment. Faith enhanced her classroom literacy environment in two ways. One way was the addition of writing materials. Prior to the PD writing was only evident during teacher led activities. After the PD, spaces for children to write were evident in many more areas of the classroom. Faith also added props and materials that engaged the children differently than they did in the classroom environment prior to the PD.

This was evident in an observation after workshop session one when the focus was on the language rich play environment. It was strawberry season and many of the local farms had pick

your own strawberry opportunities, and the church has a strawberry festival, so Faith wanted to

set up a strawberry stand in her classroom by transforming the grocery store (see figure 25).

She purchased plastic strawberries and collected donations of green baskets. Several books

about strawberries were added to the area in addition to clipboards and writing materials (see

figure 25).

Figure 25. Faith's strawberry stand.

Similarly, Faith added jungle animals in the block area for the children to play with (see figure

26).

Figure 26. Jungle animals in block area.

In the observation prior to the PD intervention writing materials were only evident during teacher-led activities, however, during and after the PD, writing materials were added to many of the areas of the classroom, emphasizing that writing and recording of information is important. As I observed, adding writing and recording materials gave children opportunities to create a jungle habitat for animals, a road way that included signs for cars and trucks as well as words to copy and create lists at a strawberry stand. For example after adding the jungle animals as props into the block area Faith also gave the children a roll of paper and crayons and suggested that the children create a jungle habitat for the animals (see figure 27).

Figure 27. Jungle habitat created by the children.

Faith added a variety of signs to the strawberry stand that said, "Strawberry Lemonade," "Strawberry Store" and "Strawberry Ice Cream," as seen in figure 25 Faith's strawberry stand. The addition of these signs gave children words they could copy as they were now able to write with the addition of the writing implements. The props along with the appropriate materials to encourage writing enhanced the literacy opportunities in Faith's classroom (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). For example in one observation as soon as playtime began several children walked directly over to the dramatic play area and began playing with the props that were added:

Charlie gets there first, picks up the clip board with the pencil, and says to the other children, "I'll be the one taking your orders, so get in line and wait your turn." Mary walks up to the stand first and says, "I'll have six strawberries." Charlie writes the number six and the word strawberry and hands the paper over to Max who then counts the strawberries out and puts them into one of the baskets. Reim walks up to the stand and picks up a few strawberries. Charlie says, "You have to wait your turn and need to get in line." Reim walks away from the strawberry stand and Faith says to him, "Reim, Charlie wants to play with you but wants you to wait in the line so you could take a turn like the other children." Reim gets back in line and Faith says to him, "You could look at a book while you are waiting. Or just think about what you would like to buy when it's your turn."

During another observation, the theme was transportation. Faith added street signs and a large cardboard box on the floor near the toy/manipulative area. She also added a variety of vehicles, including trucks and small cars, for the children to use with the street sign pictures displayed at the child's level as can be seen in figure 28 below.

Figure 28. Cardboard box street with vehicles and signs.

Several children sat down next to the cardboard box top and began drawing on the cardboard. As you can see in the figure above, the children drew a road and some things such as green grass that you might see as you travel along a road. The children added the toy cars to the drawing of the roads. One child copied a word or two they found on the signs.

The addition of props, materials and writing implements was something that Faith connected with during the PD intervention and a strategy she seemed to find easy to implement. A more difficult literacy enhancement for Faith was building opportunities for talk and conversation that was meaningful.

Talk. Faith took away from the PD initiative that the idea of talking with the children during playtime was something she would like to do more of**.** Faith said in the second interview, "Talk is important to me. This PD made me more aware of what I can do to teach oral language skills during playtime." During each of the observations when Faith was also participating in the PD intervention, the teacher-led activities that happened during playtime took up less of the playtime, which allowed Faith to spend more time with the children while they were playing. For example, when Faith added the jungle animals to the block area the following took place:

> *Several children play in the block area and put blocks around the animals. They say to Faith, "These are the cages." Faith asks the children, "What will the animals eat?" Several children nearby say, "We'll need to make the food for them." Mary says, "We could draw the food for the animals." Faith rolls out a large roll of paper on the floor and hands the children markers. Faith is drawing with the children on the floor. Mary says, "I'm going to make my tree really tall so the giraffe will be able to reach it." Charlotte walks the toy giraffe over to the tree Mary is drawing, and Faith asks, "Why do you think the tree has to be so tall for the giraffe? Charlotte says, "Because he has such a long neck. She pretends to make the giraffe eat the tree leaves that Mary has drawn. Max picks up a crayon and says, "I think we need to make this a map." Turning to Faith, Max says, "How do you spell map?" Faith says, "What letter do you think it starts with and makes the sound mmmm. Can you sound it out, mmmmmaappp?" Max, with Faith's help, writes the word "map" on the drawing. Max then says, "Now I want to make directions for the buried treasure."*

Similarly during the third observation of Faith's indoor playtime, Faith could be seen in the science area with several children observing caterpillars in a netted cage. The class was waiting for them to turn into butterflies and had been observing them for some time. Faith with several children at the caterpillar home had the following conversation:

Faith: Do you see the caterpillars? It looks like something is happening.

Daniel: (Pointing to the top of the lid) What are those?

Faith: It looks like the caterpillars are beginning to build their chrysalis.

Gianna: Will they become butterflies then?

Faith: Yes.

Daniel: Can we name them?

Faith: Of course. What name do you have for them?

Daniel: I want to call one of them Butterfly.

Gianna: Can I call the other one Rose?

Faith: Those are both really good names. Now all we have to do is wait for them to come out of their chrysalis and we'll see our beautiful butterflies, Rose and Butterfly.

Once again this conversation while the children were playing consisted of back and forth exchanges, so that the children's thinking and language was not deepened as much as it could have been. For example when Gianna says, "Will they become butterflies then?" and Faith responds, "Yes", she could have used another response such as, "Tell me how we might know if they will or not" or "What do you think might happen?" Short answers are not sufficient enough to help children think more about what is being discussed.

During one of the observations during outdoor playtime the children were swinging on the swings and Faith encouraged them to swing facing the hedge. This change in the swing direction gave the children something new to talk about and created the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary. The following happened:

Several children are on the swings. Faith says to them, "It might be fun to look the other way when you swing." One by one the children stop swinging and sit on the swing facing the other direction. Instead of facing the parking lot they are facing a large hedge. Max asks, "What's a hedge?" Faith says, "It's like a fence but made out of high bushes."

Gianna says, "Look at those clouds, why are they moving so fast?" Faith says, "It's windy today and the wind moves the clouds." The children continue to swing on the swings facing the hedge and Faith walks away.

Faith provided the children with a new vocabulary word "hedge" that could be seen by the children when they sat on the swings facing in the different direction. This conversation also gave Faith the opportunity to enhance the children's thinking about clouds. However, Faith could have continued the conversation by asking the children open-ended questions about the wind and the clouds, such as, "How do you think the wind makes those clouds move?" Depending on the child's answer Faith could have made a comment or asked another question to extend the conversation and build on children's observations.

Talk with the children during playtime is something that research finds teachers need to do more of (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Conversations between Faith and the children during playtime was an important addition to Faith's literacy practice. However, even though Faith felt talk was important and did more of it during her indoor and outdoor playtime, the conversations she had with the children were limited to questions that required only short answers or one-word responses not allowing for children's learning to be extended

Summary

Faith made several changes during and after the PD initiative, by adding props and materials to enhance the literacy environment. The teacher led activities completed during playtime took up less and less of Faith's time with each subsequent observation. The additional time during playtime allowed Faith more opportunity to participate in conversations with the children during this time of their school session. However, the conversations were not those that were meaningful and helpful for children's learning.

These changes resulted in an increase in Faith's SELA ratings/overall score of forty-eight to sixty-four (see Table 9). The increases were mostly in the area of changes to the classroom environment including materials for writing. The most significant increases can be seen in four of the item numbers. Item number five which is, "A variety of literacy items and props are used in the pretend play area" (Smith et al., 2001) increased from a three (average) in the rating prior to the PD, to a five (good) in the rating after the PD. The other significant increase was in item number six which was, "In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept" (Smith et al., 2001). This item increased from a two prior to the PD to a four after the PD. Item number seven which was "Teachers speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts, and linguistic structures" (Smith et al., 2001) also went from a two to a four. Item number nineteen which was, "Teachers promote positive interactions among children" (Smith et al., 2001) went from a three to a five. Since the SELA points range from a one to a five, with the five indicating best practices, two points is significant. Several other items increased by one point, which shows improvements as well.

Table 9

Faith's SELA ratings before and after the PD

Faith's SELA Ratings Before and After the PD			
Item #	Item	Rating Prior to PD	Rating After the PD
1	Print is used in the environment for a purpose	4	4
2	There is an inviting place where children can look at books	3	3
3	The environment promotes interest in a wide variety of books	2	2

4	Writing materials are available and easy for children to use	3	4
5	A variety of literacy items and props are used in the pretend play area	3	5
6	In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept	2	4
7	Teachers speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts, and linguistic structures	2	4
8	Organizing activities that promote language development	3	4
9	Teachers read books to children in ways that build language, knowledge, and love of books	3	3
10	Calling attention to the functions and features of print	2	3
11	Drawing children's attention to the sounds they hear in words	2	3
12	Teachers help children recognize letters	2	3
13	Teachers promote children's interest in writing	3	4
16	Activities and materials are age appropriate	3	4
17	Children can choose from a variety of developmentally appropriate materials	3	4
18	Teachers show warmth, interest, and acceptance toward children	5	5
19	Teachers promote positive interactions among children	3	5
	Total Score	**48**	**64**

In summary, despite not having much experience as a preschool teacher or with teaching literacy, Faith appeared to make the most change as indicated by her SELA scores and qualitative observations and interviews. Even though Faith made changes to the literacy environment and in the amount of time she spent with the children during playtime, the quality of classroom talk could still be improved upon.

Summary

Even though the intent of the PD was on using playtime for learning, during the observations the focus was on the questions and conversations the teachers were having with the children and not capturing how the teachers were using play as an avenue for teaching. The addition of the props and materials, including writing materials was the one area where the teachers made the most progress in using play to teach literacy. Despite, the addition of the props and materials contributing to enhanced conversations between the teachers and children, these conversations tended to consist of questions leading to simple answers, rather than deepening children's learning.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Implications

No one would disagree that young children's literacy learning is of primary importance in the early childhood years. One of the best ways for children to learn oral language is through play. However, unfortunately many teachers view play as a child's work and not as a space for the teacher to be involved in the facilitation of children's learning. Based on what is known about how much children learn during play (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009), I wanted preschool teachers at CPNS to be more intentional in their teaching during playtime. To facilitate changes in teachers practice, I implemented a professional development intervention and studied its implementation.

In this chapter I look across the findings to answer my two research questions. In doing so I examine the findings in relation to the current knowledge base on children's literacy learning, play, and effective professional development. This discussion is then used to identify key implications for practice and future research. To begin I provide a summary of the research design which led to the findings.

Research Summary

This qualitative study examined a professional development initiative focused on using play to support young children's language and literacy development. The overall question framing this study was: "What happens when I implement a PD program focused on improving the teaching of vocabulary and oral language during playtime?" This question was examined in two ways. One line of inquiry focused on the curriculum of the PD and what the professional development initiative looked like in action. The second line of inquiry focused on three teachers' literacy beliefs and practices during playtime before, during, and after the PD intervention.

The setting was a non-profit, half-day Christian preschool in an upper-middle class community in central New Jersey. The school serves approximately 120 children divided into nine classrooms with class sizes ranging from twelve to sixteen children. Children's ages ranged from two and a half through six years of age. Three of the classroom teachers who were teaching in the four-year-old classrooms were chosen as the participants for this study.

The professional development initiative took place over a period of three months and consisted of six PD workshop sessions offered every two weeks, with a reflection session in the weeks between the workshops. The focus of the PD was to support the three teacher participants to learn and practice play based teaching strategies derived from best practices in oral language and vocabulary development.

Data collection consisted of observations that were conducted in two ways; one was through the administration of the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) and the other was through the use of field notes. Observations were also audio-recorded to help with deepening of field notes. In addition, I collected documents such as teacher-generated reflections, which were completed after each PD workshop session. Finally, all teachers were interviewed once prior to the PD intervention and then again after the PD completion.

To begin to make sense of the data, I initially organized the data into four files on my computer. The files consisted of the data I had about the PD, and then I had a file for each of the three teacher participants. I began with the analysis of the PD intervention. The data for the PD curriculum was coded for the activities and processes, teacher learning, and what improvements could be made to the PD. I then sorted the data by codes using my theoretical framework to capture specific aspects of the PD curriculum. I looked across the codes for the larger themes to describe the PD and areas for improvement.

Next, I conducted a mini case study analysis to provide a descriptive portrait of each of the teachers. I did this by reading and rereading the data for each teacher participant in the study. Using my theoretical framework, I coded for beliefs and practices prior to and after the PD initiative. Data was then organized by code and then codes were combined to construct themes related to my research questions.

Validity during this process was ensured by only using data triangulated across multiple data sources. I also used my dissertation group as a form of peer review by sharing my coding schemes and initial findings throughout the analysis process. I asked each teacher participant to review their interview transcripts to ensure I captured their perspectives accurately as a form of member checking. The analysis of the PD initiative and the mini case studies led to several findings.

Findings

The overall question framing this study is guided by two questions each followed by several sub questions. The first question asks, "What does the curriculum of the PD look like?" This question guides my findings about the PD initiative. The second question asks, "What are the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play and their role in oral language and vocabulary development during playtime before and after a PD intervention." This question helps me look at what each teacher participant took away or did not take away from the PD based on her beliefs and practices. In answer to these research questions three key findings emerged. First was that the beliefs the teachers had about play and literacy mediated their response to the PD. Another finding was that the teachers made small changes in their practices including the addition of props and materials and attempting to have more conversations with children. The last key finding was that changes were needed to the curriculum and design of the PD.

Teacher Beliefs Mediated Response to the PD

In keeping with previous research that indicates that teachers' practices are shaped by their beliefs (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Hernandez, 1991; Charlesworth, Harts, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley & Fleer, 1993; Smith & Shepard, 1988; Stipek, Daniels, Galluzzo & Milburn, 1992), the teacher participants in this study also filtered everything through their beliefs about literacy and play. Each teacher had her own particular views about play, literacy learning, and teaching and the ideas presented in the PD were judged in terms of these beliefs. For Kristen, literacy was a natural phenomenon. She believed that children have an innate ability to learn vocabulary and oral language skills, because, as she explains, "They are word sponges." This was evidenced by her having the least structure in her literacy practices, not only during playtime but throughout the various parts of the day. Valerie and Faith, on the other hand, believed that literacy skills needed to be taught to be learned.

Most literacy instruction for Faith and Valerie occurred during teacher-led activities. These lessons included getting children to write their names, letters, and numbers. For Valerie it was more about understanding that the letters and numbers represent symbols, however, for Faith it was about the children recognizing and writing letters and numbers. The lessons Faith and Valerie taught also included leaning new vocabulary. They did this through implementing a lot more structured literacy pedagogies throughout their daily schedule. Both Faith and Valerie included show & tell in their daily schedule as an opportunity to encourage conversations and develop children's oral language skills. Also included in their daily schedule was the learning of new vocabulary and reading stories in addition to the teacher-led activities which included literacy during large and small group time.

Kristen did have a lot of teacher led activities but they were less focused on literacy instruction. These activities consisted mostly of completing craft projects that focused more on the product than the process of the activity. For example the year-end activity was to make a friendship book of all the children's cut out hands. The only part of this activity that the children did was trace their hands. Kristen and her assistant put the hand shapes together for the children to take home as a remembrance of the friends they had in the class that year.

Echoing other studies such as Goouch (2008), Pyle & Bigelow (2015), and Pyle & Danniels (2017), the teacher participants in this study believed that playtime was a time for children and their choices, and this belief informed their practice. Faith and Valerie believed that learning occurred when the teacher instructed, when children were playing, teachers were not involved. The teacher participants used playtime as another opportunity to lead small group activities. A few children at a time were called over to work with the teacher while the other children continued to play without teacher involvement unless teachers were managing behavioral issues.

Small Changes in Practice

Given their beliefs, the teacher participants in this study made minimal change in their literacy practices after their participation in the PD initiative. Even though the intervention was aimed at providing participants with literacy strategies to use with children during playtime, there were only two minimal changes observed and evidenced in the SELA scores. The teachers tended to take on the role of "stage manager" (Jones & Reynolds, 2011) in the children's play by setting up the literacy environment by adding props and materials. The other change was having some conversations with the children during playtime. The teachers helped the children resolve

problems by managing behaviors and providing directives taking on the role of "mediator" in the children's play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Props and materials to enhance literacy. The changes the teacher participants made to their classroom environment was consistent with their beliefs and their participation in the PD initiative. Faith made the most changes to her classroom environment. In addition to adding props, such as jungle animals to the block area, and cars and writing materials with a long cardboard piece on the floor in an open space, she also changed her grocery store to a strawberry stand during strawberry season.

Writing materials were the greatest addition to both Faith and Valerie's classroom environments. For example, Faith and Valerie added small clip boards with paper and writing materials to the science area for the children to draw or write observations of the caterpillars that were changing into butterflies. Valerie also added a small clip board with paper and writing materials to the dramatic play area. The children used it to take orders for the restaurant and write up their purchases in the grocery store. Faith added paper and markers on the floor by the blocks with the jungle animals which the children used to make a jungle habitat for the animals.

Kristen made little to no changes to her classroom environment to enhance literacy. She felt she had everything she needed. Kristen always had an excuse why things did not work to enhance the literacy environment and challenged the suggestions that were shared by the other teacher participants and myself.

As a "stage manager" the teacher sets up the environment for play by providing materials and allowing children to have the time to use these materials (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The contribution teachers make to play begins with setting up the environment (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). Setting up and maintaining an environment that is intentionally planned and

well organized helps children make choices and encourages learning about things that are of interest to them.

Attempting to have meaningful conversations with children. Meaningful conversations have been shown to be critical to the development of children's literacy and language skills (Girolmaetto & Weitzman, 2002; Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997). The amount of time the teacher participants had to have meaningful conversations with children during playtime was limited due to the mostly teacher-led activities they employed. However, as the PD intervention progressed, both Faith and Valerie began limiting the amount of time they spent with children during teacher-led, small group activities, allowing them more opportunities to interact with children. For example, during the first observation all 3 teacher participants used the entire playtime, approximately 40 minutes for small group, teacher-led activities. While Kristen continued to provide teacher-led small group activities during the entire playtime throughout the PD intervention, Faith and Valerie implemented small group activities for less time. For Valerie, small group took approximately twenty-five minutes while Faith reduced the small group time to ten minutes, allowing her to interact with the children for almost thirty minutes during playtime.

The data from this study revealed that even when the teacher participants attempted to have conversations with the children, the conversations were at a low level and did little to enhance children's oral language and literacy skills. The conversations typically consisted of questions that generated only short answers or one-word responses. Moreover, many of the conversations were about managing behaviors and providing directives. This finding is consistent with several studies that have identified the lack of rich, stimulating conversations preschool teachers have with children (Justice et al., 2008; Kontos, 1999; Massey, 2004 Massey

et al., 2008; Smith & Dickinson, 1994). The teacher participants lacked having cognitively challenging conversations with the children during playtime, which limited the opportunity to enhance children's thinking. The lack of cognitively challenging conversation was consistently observed during playtime and other times of the day such as show & tell, large and small group time, in addition to outdoor play. As a consequence, the teacher participants were missing opportunities to enhance children's oral language and build on their emerging literacy skills.

In summary, the teacher participants in this study made minimal changes during and after their participation in the PD intervention. Adding physical props and materials to the classroom is a simple adjustment to make to one's practice. However, the more difficult practice of using play as an instructional event for children's learning was not attempted by any of the participants. Their beliefs mediated their participation in the PD as well as whether they made adjustments to their classroom practices. Making the more difficult changes such as interacting with children during playtime to enhance children's learning was the type of change I was hoping for, however, minimal change was better than no change.

The Curriculum of the PD Initiative

The curriculum and design of the PD was based on the research on effective professional development (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Early et al., 2007; Hamre, Downer, Jamil Pianta, 2011; Linder, Rembert, Simpson & Ramey, 2015; McCann, Jones & Arnold, 2012; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). In keeping with this research, I used a professional development model that was situated in the teacher participants' own practice but also allowed for social and collective learning (Lave, 1996). Effective professional development models that provide opportunities for participants to use and reflect on what they are learning in their own practices over time have been shown to contribute to changes in teachers' practice (Desimone, 2009; Garet

et al., 2001; Zaslow, 2014). Therefore the PD model was an ongoing intervention lasting for

three months that consisted of cycles of inquiry where the teacher participants came together to

discuss and learn about differing literacy strategies and to reflect on how and if they tried out

these literacies in playtime. Working together in a community of practice allowed for the teacher

participants in this PD to have the opportunity to identify what they were already doing in their

practices and to work together to make changes in their oral language and vocabulary skills

being taught during playtime.

Despite being designed based on effective professional development research, the PD

itself had minimal impact on the participants' practices regarding oral language and vocabulary

instruction during playtime. The teachers reported finding some aspects of the PD more

effective than others which may account for why only minimal changes were observed in their

practices.

PD aspects informative to teacher learning. From the participants' perspectives and

from my experience as the facilitator of this PD intervention, there were two things that really

helped the teacher participants to engage in the content and think about how to apply it to their

practice. The first of these were protocols and the second of these was the opportunity to work

together.

Protocols provided all teachers with the opportunity to talk using a guide that structures

the conversations to be more productive (McDonald et al., 2007). The use of protocols helps to

guide conversations, and they also provide opportunity for collaborative experiences between

early childhood educators (Kuh, 2012). Protocols not only gave the teacher participants an

opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions, they provided the group with time to reflect and

look more deeply into several topics that were the focus of the PD initiative. Faith described the

use of the protocols as, "For me having consistency is comforting and using the protocols during each of our reflection sessions was something I was able to count on." Valerie, the teacher participant who was the most reticent described the protocols as, "I think the discussions we had using the protocols helped me to have an idea of what needed to be said." Kristen mentioned, "The protocols seem to enhance our discussions." The use of protocols gave a structure to the conversations that the teacher participants seemed to appreciate. No matter what the teachers' beliefs, using the protocols helped them participate in the conversations during the PD workshops and reflection sessions.

All three teacher participants expressed that the most valuable part of the PD was being able to have the time to work together. This gave them the opportunity to discuss what they do with others who have the same role and responsibility. Teachers are often isolated in their classrooms, leaving very little time to get together with other teachers. Research such as Desimone (2009), Garet et al. (2001) and Zaslow (2014) supports teacher's learning to be more effective when collaborating with other teachers rather than just attending a one-time workshop where the information is just given. In the second interview Kristen said, "We work together and do similar things and it is fun to hear everyone's thoughts and ideas." Faith remarked, "Talking with the other teacher participants was the most helpful." Valerie commented, "Having discussions together about our own experiences helped me think about things differently. I thought the sharing of thoughts and ideas was very helpful." Valerie also described the time for reflection and discussion together as a reminder of the things that she was already doing as well as new ways to use the strategies being taught with the children. In her second interview Valerie said:

> The PD gave me the opportunity to reflect on the strategies being taught. The assignments we had made me more aware of the things we were already doing.

However, it gave me ideas of how to incorporate these strategies into my classroom practices in new ways, such as using them during playtime. It also gave me ideas about the use of props and materials to add that would engage children in more conversation.

Valerie identified many of the things she took away from the PD initiative as she worked with the other teacher participants during the PD workshop and reflection sessions. Similar to other studies of effective professional development that supports the idea of giving teachers opportunities to reflect on their practices and their learning, the teacher participants in this study found having the time for discussions and reflection was beneficial to all three of them (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008; Neuman & Dwyer, 2011). However, not all of the aspects of the PD curriculum design were as effective as I would have hoped.

PD aspects that were less effective. Even though the PD was established using effective professional development approaches that included opportunities for teachers to learn within their own classroom contexts over time (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Zaslow, 2014), implementing six PD sessions over a twelve-week time period was not long enough for teachers to master the content. The teachers felt that the pace of the curriculum limited their ability to implement the taught literacy strategies successfully during playtime. The teachers always felt rushed. Valerie said, "I would not make any changes to the information in the PD, it met our needs, however we covered a lot of material and could always use more time." There was no balance between providing the PD content, and the time to effectively accomplish implementing the learned strategies in the children's play.

Moreover, providing this PD at the end of the school year limited what the teacher participants were able to accomplish. Kristen said in the second interview, "I really had a lot to do at the end of the year and had no time to try something new." Valerie stated, "It would have been helpful to have this PD in the beginning of the year. We would have been able to see if the

children made gains in their oral language and vocabulary from the beginning of the year to the end." The teachers may have been willing to try things out if they had more time.

Since there was not a lot of change in the teacher participants' practices in their roles around children's play perhaps another aspect that made this PD not as effective as I would have hoped was the curriculum itself. The PD intervention was more focused on teaching the strategies for oral language and vocabulary development and not on play and the teacher's role in children's play. It also lacked clarity regarding how literacy skills can be taught through play.

In summary some aspects of the PD intervention were more informative than others, however, the overall effect of the PD was minimal. Similar to other studies of teacher beliefs (e.g. of Charlesworth, et al.1991, 1993, Smith & Shepard, 1988; and Stipek et al., 1992), the teachers' practices were shaped by their views about the kinds of learning opportunities they should provide for children. Perhaps if the PD had been offered earlier and over a longer period of time, the participants may have been more willing to test out some of the literacy strategies explored in the workshops. The literature on professional development suggests that change in early childhood teachers' practices takes time (Hindman & Wasik, 2012; Jones et al., 2000; Wasik, et al., 2006). Even though some change was made in the teacher's practices, revising the PD initiative using the aspects that the teacher participants said were effective and making changes to the PD content hopefully will make the kind of change I would like to see in the classrooms at CPNS.

Implications

Given the fact that the teacher participants made little change in their literacy practices, and that they continued to view teaching as the opposite of play, there are several implications for improving the PD model in my work as the leader of CPNS. Given the findings, one of the

first things I have done as the leader of CPNS is to make a change in the curriculum model we employ. I also intend to offer a redesigned professional development model at CPNS that is focused equally on play, the teachers' role in play, and language and literacy.

Changing the Curriculum

At the time of this study, CPNS used a homegrown curriculum that was adopted in the early 90's. As the director I determined that we needed to adopt a curriculum that included more opportunities for learning and teaching through play. We needed a curriculum that would help our teachers value play as a learning opportunity for children.

Teaching Strategies, The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers (Trister-Dodge, Heroman, Colker, Bickart, Berke & Baker, 2016) was chosen as the new curriculum at CPNS. This curriculum model provides the teachers at CPNS with a framework to help them meet the needs of each child and use play as a pedagogy. The half-day schedule of Creative Curriculum includes a framework for the teachers to have playtime for sixty minutes. During this sixty-minute playtime, teachers are expected to participate in the play of children to scaffold children's learning and are no longer able to provide small group activities that consist of completing a teacher-led activity. Creative Curriculum provides the teachers with the latest research-based strategies for them to intentionally engage children in literacy through every day classroom experiences. Changing the curriculum at CPNS helps me meet my goals as a leader by providing a framework to ensure my teachers realize the importance of play and the teaching that can be completed during playtime.

This concept of teaching through play was new to the teachers at CPNS as they had been used to providing teacher-led small group activities during play or choice time, which was anywhere from thirty to forty five minutes. To help with the challenges that our teachers faced

with implementing this new curriculum we had consultants evaluate our classrooms using the

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, third edition (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2014). This

helped with changing up the classroom environments that included the addition of literacy

enhancements that were much needed in all the classrooms. The teachers were given training in

the use of the new curriculum and during our monthly curriculum meetings we began a book

study using the *Teaching Strategies, The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, The Foundation*

(Trister-Dodge et al., 2016).

We continue to use the consultants to help with fully implementing this new curriculum.

However, the change in the use of playtime has been, and continues to be difficult. Teachers are

asking for more time with the children in order to meet all the children's needs. Extending our

class time from two and a half hours to a three hour session is very much needed and one of the

school's future goals.

Revising the Professional Development Model

Given the findings of this study, the professional development model will be revised in

several ways. First, the timing of the professional development, both in the length of the

curriculum, and in the time of the school year when it is implemented will be revised. The

second revision is to add a coaching component and the third involves changes to the curriculum

content. Lastly, I need to rethink my role as the facilitator of the PD.

Timing of the professional development. The revised PD will begin prior to a new

school year when the focus will be more about teacher's beliefs. Several sessions will be

devoted to understanding what teachers believe about literacy, play, and the teacher's role in play

along with the factors and theories that support their beliefs. Understanding the teachers' beliefs

and the relationship of those beliefs to theories of early childhood education will help the teacher

participants develop a developmentally appropriate framework for teaching young children

(Jones et al., 2000). Once the new school year begins, the focus of the PD will shift to play and

the teacher's role in play. This focus will continue until the participants feel they have a better

understanding of these concepts. The PD will then continue with learning about strategies to

teach oral language and vocabulary and continue until the teachers are more comfortable using

playtime to teacher oral language and vocabulary in ways that enhance children's learning.

Another improvement is to increase the time between PD workshop sessions. I would

continue to assign the application task to be completed after the PD workshop sessions and

continue to have a reflection session for teachers to discuss what they have tried out in practice.

However, I would add a week or two or more if needed, depending on the teacher's

understanding of what is being taught to help each teacher successfully implement the strategy

and/or concept assigned.

Adding a coaching component. A number of reports and research studies have

suggested that workshops alone are not enough for professional development to be effective

(Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 200; Hindman & Wasik, 2012; Institute of Medicine and

National Research Council, 2015; Wasik et al., 2006). Zaslow & Martinez-Beck (2006) identify

coaching or mentoring as one of the supports for best practices in professional learning. One

important support this PD lacked was in-classroom mentoring or coaching to support the teacher

participants to use literacy strategies in their own classroom practices.

Coaching is a collaborative professional development strategy in which an individual

with knowledge and expertise supports teachers in the implementation of specific tasks, skills, or

teaching techniques to improve their classroom practices. Coaches guide teachers in the

implementation of strategies by working with teachers in their own classroom using

observations, discussions and reflection to help teachers to master new skills. The research of

Wasik et al., (2006) showed the importance of extending the time in between sessions and the

use of a coaching model each month for the teachers to develop the effective use of

informational talk, vocabulary, and asking questions.

Given the research that suggests that for teachers to implement new skills and techniques

successfully they need someone to scaffold their learning within their own classroom practices

(Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 2011), the next iteration of the professional development

model will employ a coach. This coach will be able to provide guidance and support for my

teachers in their learning and implementation of the new literacy skills and help them to use play

as a pedagogy for teaching. The coach must have the knowledge and expertise in early

childhood literacy and play in addition to understanding developmentally appropriate practice

and a solid foundation of early childhood development. Their role will be to encourage and

support each teacher as they implement the strategies in their own classroom practice. The coach

will observe the teachers' practices, discuss the findings, and reflect with each teacher

individually to make adjustments that help the teacher master the skills and techniques being

taught. As a supervisor it is difficult and not appropriate for me to provide this kind of support.

If we have enough funds in our budget for the 2018-2019 school year I will be able to hire a part-

time consultant to help provide this service for our teachers. If the budget does not allow for this

financial support I hope to be able to leverage one of my teachers to be a teacher leader and help

coach the other teachers at CPNS.

Content of the curriculum. The six PD workshop sessions focused on literacy, but

given the teachers' beliefs about play, the PD needed to include more about play and

preschoolers' learning and the many roles they can take in children's play. These teachers did

not recognize or know how they could use the literacy strategies discussed in the workshops through their interactions with children during play.

The revised PD curriculum will still include the same literacy strategies as these strategies are those identified by the research base on best practices for oral language and play based activities (Beals & Tabors, 1995; Cabell et al., 2015; Cabell et al., 2011; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hansen, 2014; Justice, 2004; Huttenloher et al., 2002; Morrow, 2012; Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Neuman et al., 2011; Smith & Dickinson, 1995; Zucker et al., 2010). However, I will provide additional sessions on play, and the teachers' role in play and will aim to uncover and challenge teachers' assumptions about their roles in children's play. Even though these were areas that were explored, not enough time was spent on each topic. Teachers need to have a better understanding of how play contributes to children's learning and development. They also need to have concrete ways of how they can interact with children during play to enhance children's learning. The teachers needed more time to use the literacy strategies taught while the children were playing in their own practices and reflect on what they did and how they could improve their practice.

My role as the facilitator of the PD. Having had long term relationships with all three teacher participants may have mediated my effectiveness as the facilitator of the PD. I tended to make assumptions about what the teachers believed and did in their classroom practice. Probing further during the first and second interview protocols in addition to probing during our discussions together would have given me a better understanding of each of the teacher participant's beliefs. Similarly, during our reflection sessions I encouraged sharing out by the teachers about what they had observed and perhaps tried out in their practice over the week but I did not challenge their practices in any way. My approach to facilitation meant each teacher was

not necessarily challenged to change their beliefs and practices around play and literacy learning in any way.

In the revised PD I would need to provide enough time to understand each teacher's beliefs about Pre-k, literacy, and play. Together we would define play and how to use play as an avenue for teaching. Throughout the observations and reflection time I would need to challenge what I am seeing so together we are able to come to a consensus of what is and what is not acceptable practices. This could be done using a coach, a teacher leader, or by encouraging the teachers at CPNS to question their practices through collaborative inquiry.

In summary, this revised professional development model will be provided to all the teachers and assistant teachers at CPNS. The PD will begin prior to the new school year and continue throughout the year keeping the focus on literacy strategies and using play as an avenue for learning. Since each of the three teacher participants' responses varied, as the facilitator of the PD I would continue to use the protocols, however, I would provide additional probing to not miss opportunities to gather as many details from the participants as possible. With more time, all staff participating, a coaching component, and a more active role as the facilitator, it is anticipated that I will be able to make more of an impact on teachers' practices.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited in several ways, each which have implications for future research. First, my role as the director and teacher leader of this school and as the researcher may have led to the teachers feeling like they had to participate in the PD. Even though I had a colleague interview the teachers, they may have not been as critical about the PD given I am their supervisor. Moreover, as the teacher leader I was limited in the amount of data that I was able to collect. For example, my role as leader prevented me from observing the teacher participants

more than a few times. Perhaps if I had spent more time in the classrooms, I may have been able

to see more subtle changes. I acknowledge that my role in all capacities may have created a bias

about each of the teacher participants and my interpretation of the data for each of them. I was

able to minimize this bias with the help of my dissertation group of peer reviewers.

While this study was not intended to be generalizable or applicable to multiple contexts,

it is one of the few studies that focuses on a professional development intervention aimed at early

childhood teacher improvement. There has been some focus on various professional

development initiatives in literacy (Cabell et al., 2011; 2015; Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Neuman,

Newman & Dwyer, 2011), however, more studies are needed that examine different models of

professional development and their effects on early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices,

particularly studies about change strategies in a local context such as this study.

Aside from more general studies of PD on literacy and play, as the leader of CPNS, I

will seek out funds to evaluate the revised professional development model that I will be

implementing in 2018-2019. Future evaluation studies would benefit from an external consultant

who can provide a less biased interpretation of the professional development intervention at

CPNS. An alternative way to conduct the evaluation might be to engage the teachers in a

collaborative inquiry into our school's literacy and play practices. This kind of inquiry would

encourage teachers at CPNS to question and improve upon their own teaching around literacy

and using play as a pedagogy.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of this study, and the fact that the teacher participants' beliefs

did not change, this study has proven useful for teacher learning at CPNS. The PD initiative

provided the three teacher participants at CPNS with the opportunity to examine their use of

playtime through another lens. It gave them strategies to use during playtime with the children such as having meaningful and extended conversations, asking cognitively challenging questions, and modeling of sophisticated vocabulary. It also gave them strategies to use to establish a language rich classroom environment, and have a better understanding of their role during playtime.

This PD intervention included so many teaching strategies for these teacher participant's to use during playtime, however, the expectation to implement this during the limited time the PD was offered was more than they were able to complete. Even though minimal change was made in the teacher participants' practices there was also much that was gained. Faith's comment sums it up as she said, "The professional development gave all of us a time to reflect on our own professional growth. It also gave us a better understanding of the importance of literacy and play along with strategies we could use in our classrooms."

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Appendix A

Attachment 4: Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Improving Oral Language Instruction during Playtime: A Qualitative Study of a Professional Development Initiative

Principal Investigator: Janice Parker, Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, 609-915-0253 Janice.parker@gse.rutgers.edu

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Janice Parker who is a student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to examine what happens when I implement a professional development program to help teachers' become more effective at intentionally teaching vocabulary and oral language during children's playtime.

Approximately three subjects will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately fifteen hours in addition to the classroom observations.

Participation in the study will involve being interviewed once before the professional development begins and once after the completion. These interviews will occur at a date, time and place that is convenient for you. It will also include your participation in a professional development over a five-six-month period focused on vocabulary and oral language teaching and strategies to implement during playtime in your classrooms. After each PD Session I will reflect upon the experiences and events as well as the implementation of the instruction I provide, and the teaching strategies I used. I will also reflect upon your participation, and the overall tone and learning environment. After each training session I will ask you to complete a reflection response sheet. During this same five-six-month period I will conduct observations in your classrooms (while you are teaching). The first observation I will use an instrument called Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) (Smith, Davidson & Weisenfeld, 2001). The following three months I will use the observation protocol to guide my eyes through qualitative observations using field notes. After the completion of the professional development I will use SELA once again.

For IRB Use Only. This Section Must be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.

| **IRB Stamp Box** | **IRB Stamp Box** | Version Date: v1.0 |
| | | Page 1 |

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes notes from the interviews, field notes from classroom observations and teacher-generated reflections about your participation in the professional development sessions. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location on a password protected computer.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for at least three years after the completion of the study.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may develop deeper understanding on implementing strategies focused on oral language and vocabulary development during playtime with the children in your class. However, you may receive no direct benefit from part in this study.

Participating in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about this study or study procedures, you may contact myself at 609-915-0253 or Janice.parker@gse.rutgers.edu, located at 22 South Main Street, Cranbury, NJ 08512. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Sharon Ryan at 732-932-7496 extension 8114 or Sharon.ryan@gse.edu, located at 10 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza/Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Phone: 732-235-9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions. I consent to take part in the research study regarding a qualitative study of a professional development initiative to improve oral language during playtime. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. Explanation of results will also be provided upon request.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Teacher's Name (Printed):_____Date:_____

Teacher's Signature:_____Date:_____

Principal Investigator's Signature:_____Date:_____

Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Improving Oral Language during Playtime: A Qualitative Study of a Professional Development Initiative conducted by Janice Parker. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape your participation in the interviews, observations and professional development sessions as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will be used to capture as many of the details as possible and to use for analysis by the researcher for educational purposes.

The recordings will include your responses from both interviews and the conversations from the classroom observations. Each recording will be coded using your code name for this research. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts.

The recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet with an identifier for each subject, and on a computer that is password protected using the same identifier. These recordings will be kept for no longer than three years after the completion of the study and destroyed upon publication of study results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recordings for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Teacher (Print)_____

Teacher Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date_____

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		Version Date: v1.0 Page 4

Appendix B

Interview Guide One

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. My name is Kait and I am working with Janice in her dissertation group at Rutgers. I'm also an early childhood educator so it's really nice to be in your classroom. I am hoping that you will be able to share as much information as possible to strengthen the literacy practices at CPNS. These questions and your answers are confidential and will only be used in the preparation of a professional development initiative. You will not be identified by name in any reports or documents.

The purpose of this interview today is to talk through your understanding about literacy and how you approach teaching literacy in your classroom. As you recall we will record this, so when you are ready we'll get started.

Knowledge and Understanding of Literacy

Let's start by talking a little about the learning that occurs in preschool.

1. What would you say children learn in preschool?

Now let's talk a little more about literacy specifically.

2. What literacy skills do you think children should be developing during the preschool years?

Knowledge and Understanding of Oral Language and Vocabulary

Now let's talk a little more about oral language and its importance in preschool for 4 and 5-year-olds.

3. How do you facilitate the oral language in your classroom?

4. What strategies do you use to facilitate oral language?

5. What time do you feel is most appropriate for oral language learning to occur during the preschool day?
   Probe: During welcome activities? Why?
             Large group time? Why?
             Playtime? Why?
             Outside time? Why?
             Transitions? Why?
             Story time? Why?

6. What do you do to assess language development in your classroom?

Let's talk now about vocabulary.

7. What do you think about teaching vocabulary in preschool?

8. Why is it important?

9. How do you go about teaching vocabulary to the children in your classroom?

Learning during Playtime

Let's change our focus now to play.

10. If you were to describe playtime to someone who doesn't know what it is, what would you say?
    <u>Probe:</u> What are the children doing?
          What do you do to facilitate the play during this time?

11. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities in your classroom during playtime that were meant to promote children's language abilities.
    Probe: Were there opportunities to talk?
          Were there opportunities for children to hear new vocabulary?

12. Anything else you would like to tell me about the literacy strategies you use during playtime or throughout the day?

Thank you. That completes this interview. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview Guide Two

Thank you for participating in this second interview. In this interview we will focus on your experiences in the professional development regarding literacy and language intervention. As you recall, we will record this. I just want to remind you of that. If you are ready to begin, let's get started.

Learning and changes that occurred as a result of the PD

First let 's focus on the PD intervention that you participated in during these past three months and what you may have learned from it.

1. What are your beliefs about oral language?

2. What are your beliefs about playtime and its role in addressing language development?

3. Tell me a little bit about the PD you participated in?

4. What did you learn, if anything?
    Probe: Did you learn anything about the classroom environment?
        Can you give me a specific example?
        Which aspects of the PD helped you the most to make this change?

        Did you learn anything about your roles as the teacher?
        Can you give me a specific example?
        Which aspects of the PD helped you the most to make this change?

        Did you learn anything about inside playtime?
        Can you give me a specific example?
        Which aspects of the PD helped you the most to make this change?

        Did you learn anything about outside playtime?
        Can you give me a specific example?
        Which aspects of the PD helped you the most to make this change?

    If they don't say anything about oral language:
        Probe: Give me some examples of what helped you learn, specifically, about oral language and vocabulary.

5. Of all the things you learned from the PD, tell me about something you were excited to implement in your classroom.
        Probe: How did you implement this?

        Probe: What aspects of your playtime have you changed?

6. Since you began participating in the PD, has your role during indoor playtime changed? Probe: If so, in what way?
> Probe: If it hasn't changed, why not?

7. Since you began participating in the PD, has your role during outdoor playtime changed? Probe: If so, in what way?

> Probe: If it hasn't changed, why not?

8. Thinking about the past week, please describe any new activities you used in your classroom during indoor playtime that were meant to promote children' s language abilities.

9. Thinking about the past week, please describe any new activities you used during your outdoor playtime that were meant to promote children's language abilities.

Professional Development

Now that we talked about what you learned from PD, let us focus on the PD itself

1. If you were telling someone else about this PD how would you describe it?

> Probe: What did you think about the format of the PD?
> What did you think about the specific teaching strategies?
> What activities did you engage in?

2. What aspects of the PD did you find most helpful? Probe: Was the format helpful, why? How?
> Were the specific teaching strategies helpful, why? How?

3. If you could change anything about the PD what would that be? Probe: Why?

4. What do you still want to know about oral language development and implementing the strategies you learned from the PD?

5. What do you still want to know about vocabulary development and implementing the strategies you learned from the PD?

6. What do you still want to know about engaging students in meaningful conversations during playtime?

7. If you could choose next year's PD what topic or topics would you choose? Probe: What would the structure be like? Why?

Anything else you'd like to share about your learning or experiences in the PD?

Appendix C

Rating Scale:
Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) (Smith, Davidson & Weisenfeld, 2001)

Date and Time:_____

Teacher:_____

<u>The Literate Environment</u>

Item 1. Print is used in the environment for a purpose

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Labels, charts, and signs with pictures are used for a purpose in many places; the print conveys a simple, clear message or meaning. Print is used so that it will capture children's attention, and is large, attractive and eye-catching.	Labels, charts, and signs with pictures are used for a purpose in a few areas, and are fairly well-places to capture children's attention. At least one chart is used in daily routines.	There are no examples of high quality print

Item 2. There is an inviting place where children can look at books.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
There is at least one place where children can sit comfortably to look at books alone or with friends. There is room for a least one adult. The main reading area is cozy, a corner or other	There is at least one somewhat comfortable, defined place where several children can look at books. At least 10 books are on display, arranged so that children can see and handle	There is no comfortable, inviting place for children to sit and look at books. There may be a book display, but no defined area or soft place for children to sit.

defined area, separate from other areas. It is a place for looking at books, and is not used for other activities during choice time. In the main reading area, at least 15 books in good condition, are on display so that covers show and are within easy reach for children. At least 25 additional books are available in baskets or are otherwise easy to reach in the book area.	them easily; at least 10 books are available in baskets or are otherwise easy to reach in the book area.	

Item 3: The environment promotes interest in a wide variety of books.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Many different types of books are on display and within easy reach for children. Books are attractive and in good condition. Books are placed not only in the book corner, but in one or more other areas. Some new books are introduced at least every two weeks.	Books from at least three different categories are present, and at least 20 percent reflect diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of people.	Books in only one or two categories are present

Question:

1. Are you able to rotate books in the classroom, so that your book collection changes; that is, you might exchange some books that have been in use for some others? If yes, how often?

Item 4: Writing materials are available and easy for children to use.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Paper and writing materials are out on tables for some part of every day, available for children to use as they choose. Writing materials are available outside the main writing area. Different materials are rotated during the week.	Paper and writing materials are out on tables at least three times a week for some periods, for children to use as they choose.	Paper and writing materials are never placed out on tables for children to use as they choose.

Questions:

1. Thinking about the past week, did you place writing materials out on tables for children to use? If yes, how often?
2. What materials did children use?
3. What did children do during these periods? (Probe for structured versus unstructured activity)

Item 5. A variety of literacy items and props are used in the pretend play area.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
A variety of literacy props in good condition are used in the pretend play area. Literacy props are items that encourage children to notice print, use language, and engage in writing. New literacy items and props are introduced in the pretend play area at least once a month.	A few types of literacy props and items in at least fair condition are used in the pretend play area.	There are no literacy items or props in the pretend play area.

Question:

1. In the past month, were you able to rotate some of the items in the pretend play area that encourage children's conversation, writing, and awareness of print? Can you give some examples?

Language development

Item 6: In their interactions with children, teachers encourage children to use and extend their oral language/concept development.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teacher often takes time to talk to individual children and encourage their talk, inviting extended conversations with open-ended statements such as "tell me more," or expressing interest and leaving space for the child to respond. Questions that call for predetermined answers or that cut off or redirect conversations are avoided. The teacher's language is not predominantly commands or instructions. Most of the time, adults respond to children's talk by showing interest and staying with the child's topic. Teacher often extends children's oral language by adding some new words or concepts, and sometimes elaborating on the idea or description (e.g., Child says: This milk is yum," Teacher responds: "Milk tastes very good when you are thirsty," Child says: "See the cave we made?" Teacher responds: "I do! It looks like a cave where bears might sleep").	Teacher sometimes take time to talk to individual children and encourage their talk. Sometimes teacher responds to children's talk by showing interest. Teacher occasionally extend children's oral language when they respond to the child's talk (e.g., introducing new vocabulary, an idea, or description.	Teacher rarely or never take time to talk to individual children and usually do not encourage their talk. Teacher rarely or never show interest in what children say, or extend children's oral language.

Item 7: Teachers speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts, and linguistic structures.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teacher "talk" to children frequently contains rich vocabulary, including some words that are likely to be new to children, descriptive language (e.g., adverbs and adjectives), and explanations of objects, actions, or concepts (e.g., the eggshell is breakable because it is so thin). Teacher uses somewhat more complex language structures than children typically use (e.g., whenever we go on vacation, our dog must stay with a friend until we return). Teachers use rich language in the context of interactions or activities that elicit children's interest and enjoyment (e.g., during hands-on activities, pretend play, or shared book-reading).	Teacher "talk" to children sometimes contains rich vocabulary, the use of descriptive language, an explanation of concepts, and somewhat complex language structures within the context of activities or interactions that capture children's interest.	Teacher never use rich vocabulary descriptive language an explanation of concepts and somewhat complex language structures.

Item 8: Organizing activities that promote language development. (An activity is something that goes on for 5 minutes or more, and appears to be _intentionally_ organized or facilitated by the teacher.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teacher organize a variety of activities that promote children's language development (vocabulary, use of language to communicate and reason, understanding of language). Examples are: Pretend play with the teacher joining in to introduce or extend a theme (e.g., using the phone to call the doctor); small group activities in which children are invited to join in conversation (e.g., comparing items at a science table or encouraging children to share experiences they had together during a class trip); reading informational books and engaging in hands-on activities and conversations that build knowledge. Most of these activities are done with small groups. Some activities are thematically related allowing children to explore a concept or area of knowledge over several days (e.g., transportation, rain). Activities are organized flexibly with teacher responding to individual interests and styles of children, and include many individual and small group interactions.	Teacher organize some activities that promote children's language development.	There are no activities that promote children's language development.

Questions:

1. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities in your classroom that were meant to promote children's oral language abilities – how they express themselves verbally.

2. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities that were meant to increase children's knowledge about different things? (Point out that some activities the teacher cited above may build knowledge, and probe for others.)

Item 9: Teachers read books to children in ways that build language, knowledge, and a love of books. *Observe a book-reading*.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers read daily to children, using many different kinds of books that are interesting and enjoyable to children. Teachers read daily to children in small groups. Teachers read in a lively, engaging way, inviting children's involvement.	Teachers read to children daily in large groups, but infrequently to small groups or individual children. Quality of shared reading and books is at least fair.	Teachers read to children at least three times a week. Quality of shared reading and books is poor.

Questions:

1. How often do you read books to the children?
2. In the past week, were you or others able to read to the children in small groups, or to individual children? How often?
3. Please give some examples of books you have read to the children in the past month.
4. How do you choose the books that you read?

Item 10. Calling attention to the functions and features of print.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers call attention to the functions and features of print daily in a variety of ways Efforts to call attention to the functions and features of print are woven into everyday activities, and are fun and engaging for children.	Teachers sometimes call attention to the functions of print; quality of the strategies is at least fair.	Teachers do not call attention to the functions and features of print.

Questions:

1. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities or things you did that help children understand the purpose of print and how we use print – for example, to help them understand that print has meaning, that we read from left to right: (Probe for how often each method is used.)

Item 11: Drawing children's attention to the sounds they hear in words.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers use a variety of activities every day to draw children's attention to the sounds in words. Activities are conducted in a fun, engaging way that captures children's interest.	Teachers use some activities to draw children's attention to the sounds in words. These are carried out in ways that are at least somewhat engaging for children.	Teachers do not use activities to call attention to sounds in words.

Questions:

1. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities or things you did that help children become more aware of the sounds they hear in words: (Probe for how often each method is used.)

Letters and Words

Item 12: Teachers help children recognize letters.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers use a variety of methods every day to help children learn to recognize letters. These activities are carried out in a fun, engaging way	Teachers use at least three methods to help children learn to recognize letters. The quality of these methods is at least fair.	There is no evidence that activities are used to help children recognize letters

Question: 1: Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities or things you did that help children learn to recognize letters: (Probe for how often each method is used.)

Item 13: Teachers promote children's interest in writing.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers use a variety of methods to encourage children's interest in writing. Children's writing is on display in the classroom. Teachers show a positive response to all kinds of writing efforts, including scribbling, but also call attention to letters or words they can identify.	Teachers sometimes encourage children's interest in writing, using methods that are at least fairly enjoyable and engaging.	Teachers do not encourage children's interest in writing. Teachers might respond to children's writing efforts by correcting mistakes and otherwise fail to respond positively to these efforts.

Question:

1. Thinking about the past week, please describe any activities or things you did that help children become interested in writing.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Item 16: Activities and materials are age appropriate.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Activities and materials in the classroom are consistently age-appropriate, allowing exploration and enjoyment. There is little or no evidence of highly structured activities that stress correctness or rote learning	Some activities and materials are developmentally appropriate	There are very few age-appropriate activities. There are many highly structured activities

Item 17: Children can choose from a variety of developmentally appropriate activities.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
The program offers ample time and opportunity for children to play individually and in small groups in activities of their choice. More than half the time children can choose, what they want to do. While engaged in self-chosen activities, children's individual preferences and skills are respected by teachers. Available activities reflect developmentally appropriate practice, and there is an absence of highly structured activities such as worksheets or rote learning.	Children have choice in their activities at least half the time. There is a moderate range of choices in activities or materials. Activities and/or materials are of mediocre quality. Teachers allow some self-direction within chosen activities, but sometimes impose their ideas about what the child should do.	Most of the time, children cannot engage in a developmentally appropriate activity of their choice.

Item 18: Teachers show warmth, interest, and acceptance toward children.

5	4	3	2	1

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers consistently show warmth and acceptance towards children, by using a kind tone of voice, smiling, giving encouragement, and showing affection. Teachers frequently show interest in individual children and their efforts. Teachers correct children's behavior by explaining what the child can do.	Teachers sometimes show warmth and acceptance toward children. Teachers occasionally show interest in individual children and their efforts. At times teachers might correct a child's behavior with a command and no suggestion of an alternative activity.	Teachers rarely or never show warmth toward children Sometimes teachers are harsh toward children. Teachers rarely show positive interest in individual children.

Item 19: Teachers promote positive interactions among children.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Strong evidence - 5	Some evidence - 3	Minimal evidence - 1
Teachers consistently help children learn social skills, when helping to resolve conflicts; methods include approaching children calmly and acknowledging their feelings, gathering information from children,, restating he problem, asking children for solutions, and supporting them in their efforts to get along. Teachers provide many opportunities for pairs and small groups of children to work or play together cooperatively and call attention to positive results of children cooperating together.	Teachers sometimes help children resolve conflict with positive methods, but many sometimes impose their own ideas about how conflicts should be resolved. Teachers occasionally encourage cooperation between children.	Teachers never help children resolve conflict with methods that promote social skills or encourage cooperative interactions among children.

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Teacher: _____

Date of Observation: _____

Time of Observation: _____

1. The physical setting:

   - Materials

   - Classroom set up/environment

2. The activities and interactions

   - What interactions are taking place between teachers/children?

3. Conversations

   - What conversations are taking place between teachers/children?

4. Informal and unplanned activities

5. Non-verbal communication

   - What actions are the teachers doing to incorporate play?

Upon completion of this observation drawing on Miles & Huberman, (1994) I will reflect upon the following:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out in this contact?

2. Summarize the information I got (or failed to get) during this observation.

3. Anything else that stuck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important?

4. What new or remaining questions do I have for the next contact with this teacher?

Appendix E

Teacher Generated Response Sheet

From this PD session, please take a few minutes to answer the following questions,

please try to answer the questions with as many examples and details as possible:

1. In your own words what was this PD about?

2. What did you learn?

3. Did the PD generate any ideas of things you would like to try in your classroom? If yes,

   give examples.

4. What are your next steps?

Appendix F

Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection Method	Date of Collection
First Teacher Interview	Beginning of April 2016
SELA #1: Observation	Beginning of April 2016
PD Session 1	Beginning of April 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection
-

PD Session 2	Middle of April 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection

Observation Protocol	Middle – End of April 2016
PD Session 3	Middle of April 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection

PD Session 4	Beginning of May 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection

Observation Protocol	Middle of May 2016
PD Session 5	Middle of May 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection

PD Session 6	End of May 2016

- Teacher-Generated-Reflection
- Researcher-Generated-Reflection

Observation Protocol	End of May 2016
SELA #2: Observation	Beginning of June
Interview #2	Middle of June

Appendix G

Professional Development Curriculum

Table 1. Curriculum Implementation Schedule

Session 1 **April 6**	**The Importance of Play and Literacy and the Language Rich Play Environment**
	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Identify improvements that can be made to each classroom area to establish or enhance a literacy rich play environment in that area. Visit the other classrooms and observe the literacy rich classroom areas and identify the strengths as well as improvements to be made: April 6 –12
Reflection Session *April 13*	**Focus: Literacy Rich Play Environment**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 1
Session 2 **April 20**	**The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development**
	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Focus on the teaching of playful learning related to oral language and vocabulary development and linked to developmentally appropriate practices: April 20 -27
Reflection Session *April 27*	**Focus: Oral Language taking place during Playtime**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 2

Session 3 **April 20**	**The Teachers' Role in Oral Language and Vocabulary through Play**
	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Focus on the teachers' role during playtime and identify the roles that you take on during playtime: April 20-27
Reflection Session *April 27*	**Focus: The Teachers' Role during Playtime**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 3
Session 4 **May 4**	**Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime**
	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify the use of extending and meaningful conversations: May 4 – May 10
Reflection Session *May 11*	**Focus: The Teachers use of extended and meaningful conversations during playtime and the use of the strategies learned**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 4
Session 5 **May 18**	**Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime (continued)**

Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify the use of cognitively challenging questions during conversations: May 18 – May 24

Reflection Session *May 25*	**Focus: The Teachers use of extended and meaningful conversations during playtime and the use of the strategies learned**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 5
Session 6 **June 1**	**Putting it All Together: Review strategies and discuss how to overcome any obstacles preventing the use of them.**
	Situated Activity/Skill Development: Observe and identify strategies being used to build vocabulary and use conversations in the other classrooms: June 1 – June 7
Reflection Session *June 8*	**Focus: The effective strategies being used to build vocabulary and use conversations**
	Use protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" to reflect on what we did and saw during the situated activity/skill development from session 6

Professional Development Curriculum

Session 1:

Topic: **The Importance of Play and Literacy and the Language Rich Play Environment:**

This professional development will begin with an opening exercise that will provide an

environment of excitement, and immediate engagement (Silberman, 2006). This session will focus on the importance of play in addition to providing information on how to set up the physical space as well as the supports to provide for a literacy rich environment in the preschool classroom.

Materials: Computer, power point, paper, pens, pencils, classroom pictures, skill builder activity worksheet, Four "A"s Text Protocol, Atlas protocol

Objective:

1. Participants will identify the attributes that constitute the organization of a language rich classroom environment (open space, specific areas, variety of materials that encourage creativity and problem-solving, dramatic play centers) and make improvements to their classroom environments.

2. Participants will identify the appropriate provision of props and materials to increase opportunities for oral language development.

Distribute article "Building Language and Literacy through Play" (Bodrova, Leong, 2003) prior to the session and ask the participants to read it before the session.

Organizational Structure/Activities and Procedures:

1. Welcome/Introduction activity (10 minutes) will be a multipurpose exercise. These activities will include a technique called "Active Knowledge Sharing" (Silberman, 2006, p. 61). As participants enter the room they will be asked to do a "quick write" about their memory of learning to read and write. For the opening exercise I will ask each participant to share their memories of how they learned to read and write.

2. Power point on "Learning through Play in Early Childhood, Language and Literacy Development" C:\Users\Janice\Docu C:\Users\Janice\Documents\Rutgers\Learning Through Play in Preschool.pptx (15 minutes).

3. Article discussion using 4 A's Protocol (School Reform Initiative) (15 minutes): "Building Language and Literacy through Play" by Bodrova & Leong. Provide article to be read prior to our session together. This article provides examples of how language and literacy learning during play can be developed through the use of props, the creation of literacy rich environments, and ideas for expanding themes that are of interest to children.

4. Skill Builder: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p.130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Identify the improvements that can be made to each classroom area to establish or enhance a literacy rich play environment in each area. Visit the other classrooms and observe the literacy rich classroom areas and identify the strengths as well as improvements to be made.

5. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times. (National School Reform Faculty).

6. Distribute teacher-generated reflection and ask each participant to complete and return by Friday.

Outcomes: Be able to establish a language rich classroom environment with materials and props to encourage oral language and vocabulary development.

Session 2:

Topic: **The Importance of Play to Oral Language and Vocabulary Development:** This session will focus on establishing the overview and importance of the role of play to oral language and vocabulary development for preschoolers.

Materials: Paper, pens, pencils, play question activity sheet, skill builder activity worksheet, protocols, teacher-generated reflection sheet.

Objective: Participants will analyze the importance of play to oral language and vocabulary.

Organizational Structure/Activities and Procedures:

1. Begin this session with our findings and reflections from session 1 using the protocol: "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National School Reform Faculty). This will help provide each participant a way to analyze how a new understanding has developed and the factors that contributed to this understanding (10 minutes).

2. Identify what is needed to establish and enhance appropriate literacy rich play environments.

3. Discussion on the importance of play to oral language and vocabulary development for preschoolers including play question activity sheet. (15 minutes)

4. Skill Building: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p. 130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Use provided worksheet to identify evidence of oral language learning during indoor and outdoor playtime. In your own classrooms identify evidence of oral language taking place during indoor and outdoor playtime by you and your assistant teacher.

5. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times (National School Reform Faculty)

Outcome:

1. Be able to notice teachers' interactions with the children during playtime and their conversations with children.

2. Be able to identify oral language and vocabulary learning during play.

Session 3:

Topic: **The Teachers' Role in Oral Language and Vocabulary through Play:** This session will provide the participants with the role of the teacher to promote oral language development and vocabulary skills, and why playtime is an important time to provide these opportunities to children.

Materials: Computer, 4 A's Protocol worksheet, case study, computer, power point, skill builder activity worksheet, ,atlas protocol, protocol for analysis and reflection

Objective: To evaluate and reflect upon the role of the teacher in play to promote oral language and vocabulary development.

Outcome: Participants will be able to identify ways in which play can contribute to the oral language and vocabulary development of preschoolers and what the teachers' role is in play.

Organizational Structure/Activity and Procedures:

1. Begin this session with our findings and reflections from session 1 using the protocol, "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" (National School Reform Faculty). This will help provide each participant a way to

analyze how a new understanding has developed and the factors that contributed to this understanding (10 minutes).

2. "Initial case problem" (Silberman, 2006, p. 74) (5 minutes): To help grab the attention of the participants for a lecture about the importance of oral language and vocabulary development I will share a brief case with the participants, (Morrow, Roskos & Gambrell, 2016, p.80).

3. Discussion of Case Study

4. The Teachers Role in oral language and vocabulary through play: discussion and activity

5. Skill Builder: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p.130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Identify the roles you use in your classrooms.

6. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times. (National School Reform Faculty).

Outcome: Participants will be able to identify the teacher's role during playtime and the development oral language and vocabulary during play.

Session 4: Meaningful and Extend Conversations during Playtime. This session will provide the participants with ways to extend and provide meaningful conversations during playtime with the children in their classroom, through the use of conversation strategies including, clarification and extending, go beyond the here and now (what happened yesterday, last week and what might happen in the future), and think aloud (Heroman & Jones, 2010; Morrow et al., 2016).

Begin this session with our findings and reflections from session three using the. "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" that will help provide each

participant with the opportunity how a new understanding has developed and what helped them understand (National School Reform Faculty). (10 minutes)

Materials: computer, power point, classroom pictures, skill builder activity worksheet, atlas protocol, protocol for analysis and reflection

Objectives:

1. Participants will implement strategies for meaningful and extended conversations with children during both indoor and outdoor playtime.

Materials: Power point, observation worksheet

Organizational Structure/Activity and Procedures

1. Present a brain friendly lecture (Silberman, 2006) on extending and providing meaningful conversations. Power point (20 minutes): In order to provide this type of lecture, I must build an interest, provide the information, maximize the understanding and reinforce the materials (Silberman, 2006).

2. Share transcripts of teachers having meaningful conversations with children in their classrooms.

3. Discussion of the strategies presented and any obstacles that might prevent the use of them during playtime (15 minutes).

4. Skill Builder: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p.130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Use the observation worksheet to observe in one another's classrooms during playtime and identify the use of extending and meaningful conversations that are taking place during this time.

5. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times. (National School Reform Faculty).

Outcome: Be able to have more meaningful and extended conversations with the children.

Session 5: Extended and Meaningful Conversations during Playtime Continued. This professional development session will provide the participants with the strategies that can be implemented to provide children with opportunities for meaningful and extended conversations with the use of cognitively challenging questions that include more open-ended questions that ask children to elaborate and evaluate.

Begin this session with our findings and reflections from session four using the. "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" that will help provide each participant with the opportunity how a new understanding has developed and what helped them understand (National School Reform Faculty). (10 minutes)

Materials: computer, power point, classroom pictures, skill builder activity worksheet, atlas protocol, protocol for analysis and reflection

Objectives:

1. Participants will implement the use of cognitively challenging questions.

Materials: Power point, Blooms Taxonomy, copies of the observation worksheet

Organizational Structure/Activity and Procedures

1. Present a brain friendly lecture (Silberman, 2006) on cognitively challenging questions, including the types of questions and their importance of oral language and vocabulary development for preschoolers, Power point (20 minutes).

2. Share transcripts of teachers having meaningful conversations along with using cognitively challenging questions with children in their classrooms.

3. Discussion of when these types of questions are used and what obstacles prevent the use of them during playtime (15 minutes).

4. Skill Builder: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p.130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Use the observation worksheet to observe in one another's classrooms during playtime and identify the use of cognitively challenging questions that are being used by the teacher during this time.

5. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times. (National School Reform Faculty).

Outcome: Be able to use cognitively challenging questions with the children during playtime.

Session 6: Putting it all together. This session will provide the participants to look at the many ways we can provide the vocabulary and oral language development in our classrooms during playtime.

Begin this session with our findings and reflections from session four using the. "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" that will help provide each participant with the opportunity how a new understanding has developed and what helped them understand (National School Reform Faculty). (10 minutes)

Materials: computer, power point, classroom pictures, skill builder activity worksheet, atlas protocol, protocol for analysis and reflection, NAEYC "Learning to Read and Write Position Statement" and Summary, book; "Oh How I Wish I could Read" by John Gile & Frank Fiorello, (1995),

Objective: Integrate the strategies learned to promote vocabulary and oral language development in our classrooms during playtime.

Organizational Structure/Activity and Procedures

Distribute NAEYC position statement, "Learning to Read and Write" prior to the session and ask the participants to read it before our session together.

1. Power Point (30 minutes): Review of the strategies learned and how we can overcome any obstacles.

2. Group activity (15 minutes): Select a theme that would interest children. Discuss how we would build vocabulary and use conversations for that theme during playtime. These strategies include creation of word lists, and carrying on conversation during playtime to include the explanations of new words being used (Christ & Wang, 2010).

3. Skill Builder: "Active Skill Development" (Silberman, p.130): Describe the activity and allow for questions (10 minutes). Use the observation worksheet to observe in one another's classrooms during playtime and identify the strategies we learned.

4. After one week we will reconvene as a group and reflect upon our observations. We will use a protocol "Atlas, Looking at the Data" that will help us reflect on what we are seeing during our observation times. (National School Reform Faculty).

5. Read a book (5 minutes) "Oh, How I Wish I Could Read" by John Gile & Frank Fiorello, (1995). This book shares the message of the importance of reading

Closing Activity: Review our findings and reflections from this last session four using the "The Process of Developing Understanding: A Protocol for Reflection and Analysis" that will help provide each participant with the opportunity how a new understanding has developed and what helped them understand (National School Reform Faculty). (10 minutes). Decide on our next step.