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PLAY THEN AND NOW: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
TEACHERS' PLAY HISTORIES AND PRACTICES

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Play then and now: A narrative study of early childhood

teachers' play histories and practices

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While advocacy efforts for a child's right to play have been significant over the past decade, these efforts have not necessarily translated into teaching practices within the current academic climate (Falk, 2012; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). If teachers are a key piece in what is to be considered quality play experiences for young children (Hadley, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003), teachers' perceptions of and experiences with play move to the fore as an important part of what is considered their "play pedagogy" (Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013, p. 4).

The purpose of this narrative study is to uncover and describe the ways in which teachers' personal *play histories* inform their facilitation of, provision for, and perceptions of dramatic play in their classroom. These descriptions were framed by research questions that sought to illuminate how past relationships with play have an impact on the present: How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom? How do teachers interpret

play both personally and professionally? How do teachers facilitate for play? How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play? Qualitative data was collected via semi structured interviews, in classroom observations and one focus group. Narrative analysis was conducted by individual case to create a play history narrative and across the four cases to examine commonalities. This analysis created space for four vivid descriptions of a history with play, and the development of a model that illustrated the reflective process of play history narrative as a vehicle for pedagogical change.

This study's findings highlight play history creation as a powerful reflective tool for teachers. Considering this reflective process as a builder of teacher identity and a key piece in the development of their personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988), creates space for the use of personal play narrative with both pre-service and in-service teachers.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

I am talking about childhood with my friend Karen, who is shocked that I have never played kick the can. “You don’t know kick the can?” Karen spent her childhood in a small town in Maine, and grew up playing outside in the street and in the woods. I played outside often as a child, but not all year round like Karen. Karen and her siblings played outside until five, when called in for dinner, even on the coldest of Maine winter days. In our reminiscing about our own childhood play, she began to talk thoughtfully about how she sees children play now. Throughout her 15-year career as an educator in the New York City school system, Karen has identified strongly as someone who values not only play, but also specifically outdoor play. Ten years ago as a teacher she would skip her own lunch period to make sure her students got outside every day, rain or shine—and her attitude toward and practice around play eventually spread to her co-workers. Later, as an administrator, Karen continued to proactively encourage these kinds of choices, by mandating a similar kind of commitment to play with the staff at her school; she scolded an imaginary teacher, ““No, I don’t care if it’s snowing outside, you go outside, I don’t care if it’s 30 degrees outside, you go outside and you play””.

This project is motivated by the many conversations like this one that I have had with fellow early childhood educators. Every teachers’ specific experiences of childhood play and their particular career trajectory may be unique, but the interconnectedness of personal play history and choices in individual pedagogical practice is not—speak to an educator about play, and conversation invariably shifts to discussion of their childhood experiences of play. The developmental importance of play is a central principle of early childhood education, yet many teachers struggle to keep play as the central focus in their

own classrooms. Play is important for children's development (Eberle 2011; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer & Berk, 2009) - how do some teachers create time and space for play in their classrooms, and perhaps more importantly, what motivates some teachers to fight for play in school environments where play is not a supported component of the curriculum? This qualitative study explores why educators make the choices they do regarding play in the classroom, and more specifically, how personal childhood experiences of play might inform those choices.

The Role of Play in the Classroom

The implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001), and the more recent Race to the Top initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) heightened pressure for academic performance in early education and, as a result, play-based practices have been in danger of being pushed entirely out of many early childhood classrooms (Falk, 2012; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). There continues to be pressure to make early education a more rigorous academic environment, but play itself has remained a key component of many early education curricula. Research continues to demonstrate the crucial role of play in young children's learning and development, and places play as not a threat to, but a vehicle for academic content and preparation for future learning. (Elkind, 2008; Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; Gopnik 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009).

More specifically, *dramatic play* has been shown to be an important tool for social emotional and academic growth of young children. The term dramatic play has come to be broadly defined and incorporates much curricular interpretation, but for the purposes of this study, dramatic play will be defined as children taking on a role in which

they pretend to be something or someone other than themselves, utilizing real or imagined props and taking on the actions and speech of a character in a particular circumstance (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990).

Within this context, dramatic play has proven to be a beneficial component to children's overall development. From research that supports the broader social emotional skills involved in dramatic play such as problem solving, social learning and self-regulation, (e.g., Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Hughes, 1999; McArdle, 2001), to the particular skills involved in dramatic play such as negotiation, perspective taking, role taking and cooperation (e.g., Ashiabi, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Howe, Moller and Petrakos, 1993), research on the importance of dramatic play for the social emotional development of young children has spanned decades.

Pushing against the notion that play is a frivolous activity, practice-based research has sought to show positive correlations between academic outcomes and dramatic play in its various forms. There are a variety of studies that focus specifically on the positive relationship between dramatic play and academic learning such as cognition and dramatic play, (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003; Johnson, 2002), as well as particular academic domains like literacy and math (e.g., Cook, 2000; Podlozny, 2000; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Marbach & Yawkey, 1980). These academic benefits, evidenced in a growing body of literature, are one of the reasons for the continued privileged position of dramatic play in the early childhood classroom and what is considered to be developmentally appropriate practice (Bodrova & Leong, 2001, 2007; Copple & Bredekemp, 2009; Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999; Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

In addition to these academic and social emotional benefits, there is also a wealth of research that strongly suggests that dramatic play has a positive impact on school readiness (e.g., Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Espinosa, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). As early childhood has become a part of the public-school system, this research has helped legitimize dramatic play's important role in the classroom, to such an extent that evidence indicates early learning environments without playful curriculums can be harmful for children's academic and social emotional development (Falk, 2012; Miller & Almon, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003; National Association of School Psychologists, 2005).

Unfortunately, even as play continues to be theoretically, empirically, and practically valued by those considered most expert in the field, play is less pervasive in practice. Miller & Almon (2009) found that among 200 kindergarten teachers in New York and Los Angeles, 25% of Los Angeles teachers had no time for play, and in a 2008 study it was found that 30,000 schools have given up recess to ensure more time for academic work (Elkind, 2008). While advocacy efforts for a child's right to play have been significant over the past decade, these have not necessarily translated into teaching practices within the current academic climate (Falk, 2012; Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009).

The Role of the Teacher in Children's Play

Historically, early childhood research has focused primarily on children's learning and development, with less attention focused on teaching (Ryan & Goffin, 2008). However, in the past twenty years researchers have shifted their gaze to teachers and their impact on early learning environments (Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner & Yarnall, 2001).

Researchers now identify teachers as a key variable in what is considered to be quality early childhood education, and have found that without effective teaching, children do not have access to the educational experiences they need to succeed (Barnett, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). From their interactions in the classroom, to their personal beliefs about theory and policy, the work of teachers has come to be recognized as a critical part of what makes for a successful classroom.

The work of teachers involves the relationships and interactions they have with their students. Teacher-child interactions have been found to play a major part in educational quality, have become an important piece to research and policies that involve teachers and teaching (e.g., de Kruif, McWilliam, Ridley, & Wakely, 2000, Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). From what is considered to be developmentally appropriate practice for teachers, to the impact of teacher-child interactions on academic and social emotional outcomes, (e.g., Copple & Bredekemp, 2009; Kontos, 1999; McWilliam, Scarborough & Kim, 2003; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011), who the early childhood teacher is and the way he or she interacts with children has become a critical factor in what is considered to be quality early childhood education.

The interaction that a teacher has with children at play can shape the quality of those play experiences. There has been a range of roles investigated and recommended for teachers to inhabit when children play; these range from outside observer and facilitator to active player (e.g Hadley, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003). The consensus is that from outside the play, or from within, teachers need to make careful choices about the ways they

engage with children, based on their understandings of the play's purpose and their own teaching goals. However, there has been little research exploring what it is that influences why a teacher makes these choices. Thinking about why a teacher takes a specific approach to (or role in play) places the teacher at the forefront of what it means to facilitate play in the early childhood classroom and draws our attention to teachers' own perspectives and beliefs about the value of dramatic play.

Given that play and the teacher's place in it are key components to quality early childhood education, it is important to investigate how teachers themselves "see" their involvement in the play of their students. A teacher's "play pedagogy" is the practical expression of their personal and professional ideas about play in the early childhood classroom (Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013, p. 4), including the provision of time, space, materials, and the degree of direct teacher engagement in children's play. The "pedagogical tool kit" that each teacher brings to their classroom includes not only skills learned in teacher education programs, but also personal experiences, memories and values (Ayers, 1989; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013). These personal memories and experiences can be recalled and processed through thoughtful pedagogically-based reflection. A "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983), is one who understands that teaching is not a one-way street; rather it is a multi-faceted dynamic relationship between teachers, children, context and history. Space for teachers to explore and examine these relationships and experiences with play provides a platform for acknowledgement of their pasts in relation to how they think about, allow for, and engage in play now as a professional.

The purpose of this narrative study is to uncover and describe the ways in which teachers' personal *play histories* inform their facilitation of, provision for, and perceptions of dramatic play in their classroom. The term play history is not limited to only childhood memories, rather, it can be further clarified as memories of, and experiences with, play as children, young adults and as grown practitioners. These descriptions will be framed by research questions that seek to illuminate how past relationships with play have an impact on the present:

- How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom?
- How do teachers interpret play both personally and professionally?
- How do teachers facilitate for play?
- How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play?

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature around the relationship between teachers and play is explored in two ways. I begin with the theoretical perspectives on a teachers' place in the play of young children to illustrate how the role of the teacher and their pedagogical decisions about play have moved to the fore of what is considered to be best practices in early childhood education. Currently, teachers are expected to maintain an active role in the play activities of their students in myriad ways, which requires thoughtful planning and pedagogical reflection. Next, the relevant literature surrounding the various ways in which teachers engage in the play of their students is reviewed, as well as the sources of influence on that engagement. Finally, the literature around teachers' memories of play is reviewed, revealing a gap in the research around history and memory as an influence on play pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

Perspectives on Teachers and Play

Current research and practices have adopted a progressive perspective on play in which an active teacher role is supported (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Copple & Bredekemp, 2009). From this position, play is approached as a location for teachers to engage deeply in the play of the children in their classrooms in a variety of ways, both from outside the play or from within. Although this type of thoughtful, pedagogical consideration of play is currently valued, teachers' direct involvement has not always been considered a positive or productive component of dramatic play in the early childhood classroom. Here, we look at the role of the teacher and play from a theoretical perspective.

Historically, play was viewed as the pleasurable past time of young children that was simultaneously educational. In his influential book *Emille* or *On Education* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau highlighted children's innate ability to learn through their interactions in the world, rather than through books and didactic instruction. By posing play as the natural activity of young children, Rousseau claimed that rather than placing children's activity under the control of adults, children should be free to explore independently through play. This, Rousseau argued, would be the location for children's development (Rousseau, 1762; Bergen, 2014). Johann Pestalozzi (1894) and John Dewey (1910, 1916) both drew from Rousseau's theory, stressing that by allowing children the freedom to explore and play within environments that support children's natural play abilities, self-directed learning through play would occur. The teacher's role was to remain an observer, one whose main purpose was to create an environment in which children could learn independently through play (Bergen, 2014; Dewey, 1916; Pestalozzi, 1894).

Perspectives on children's play from the early to mid-20th century focused on the cognitive and social emotional development of children at play. Freud (1956) and Piaget (1962) led educational thinking toward understanding children's play as a child-created arena for experimentation and knowledge creation. These theoretical perspectives held the role of teachers at a distance, so that the developmental value of play could do its work. According to Piaget's (1962) constructivist approach, just as a child grows through specific developmental stages, their play grows in stages as well. Piaget stated that when children play, they are constructing knowledge utilizing their existing cognitive schema. In other words, in play, children make meaning of new experiences through the lens of

their existing knowledge base; in play they are practicing what they already know (Piaget, 1962).

Similarly, Freud (1956) and Erikson (1963) viewed children's play as an act of imaginative creation, in which children re-arrange their world into a new, more ordered way. To Freud and Erikson, play was a location for children to face existing anxieties, try on new social roles and to practice and ultimately strengthen their understanding of their own experiences (Bergen, 2014; Freud, 1956). Freud and Erikson clarified play as the work of children in which they independently experiment with their existing psychological schema in order to understand their world.

These theoretical understandings led to a belief that a teacher's presence could disturb children's play and its inherent developmental benefits. Research well into the late 20th century reinforced that adult interference would inhibit children's freedom in play, and therefore its developmental value (Bloch & Choi 1990; Crain, 1980; Kagan, 1990; Spodek & Saracho, 2006). This belief that teachers should be bystanders of children's play was reflected via what the field considered to be appropriate practices in the early childhood classroom. In the first version of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Copple & Bredekemp, 1986), published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Bredekamp stated that teachers, "...prepare the environment so that it provides stimulating challenging materials and activities for children. Then teachers closely observe to see what children understand and pose additional challenges to push their thinking further" (p.48). During this time, teachers were expected to interact as little as possible in the play of young children.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) identified play as a location in which learning and development meet, but not in a vacuum. Vygotsky thought that the learning and development that occurs in play cannot exist without the acknowledgment of cultural-historical context, and the presence of other social members. Moving beyond the constructivist views of his predecessors, Vygotsky viewed play as a reflection of the external and internal influences in the child's world, and a constant source of developmental forward motion.

According to Vygotsky (1978), play has three components: children create an imaginary situation, they take on and act out roles and they follow specific sets of rules determined by their specific roles. Here, in this particular play context, Vygotsky asserts that play has a hand in the development of children's higher mental functions. Children are able to think symbolically, and self-regulate -- two higher mental functions not typically within the repertoire of a young child (Bodrova and Leong, 2007; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). As a child plays, he or she is extended into areas of skill and development beyond their current capacity, "...behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behavior; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 74)

This developmental extension is what helps to create a *Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD*. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that when a child is challenged to acquire certain skills and knowledge that would normally be out of reach, an area of development, or, a zone of proximal development is created in which the gap between what a child can do and what a child cannot do becomes much smaller. (Myers & Berk, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). He states:

The play-development relationship can be compared with the instruction-development relationship, but play provides a background for changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. Play is a source of development and creates a zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginative situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 16)

Vygotsky never explicitly talked about teacher involvement in play. He did, however, emphasize the zone of proximal development as an area ripe for instruction, and for that instruction to hold the most value, it should be aimed at each individual child's ZPD (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Current Views on Teachers and Play

Although Vygotsky was not writing from within the current academic climate, over the past twenty years there has been a shift in the way teachers are encouraged to participate in young children's play based on Vygotsky's theoretical understandings. Research and early childhood policy reflects the view that dramatic play is a location for knowledge construction, but this process is no longer considered to be a stagnant, solitary act (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). Teachers are no longer expected to simply provide materials and observe children at play, as teachers are now seen as an integral part of children's play processes in the early childhood classroom. One reason for this shift in teacher involvement is the emergence of Vygotskian-based curriculum developers that stress the importance of active intentional teaching.

For example, in their dramatic play-based curriculum *Tools of the Mind*, Bodrova and Leong (2007) claim that simply supporting children's play is not enough, and that

teachers must actively push play forward by helping to organize play or taking on a role inside the play story in order to “expand the scope of their play” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 145). This perspective, influenced by Vygotsky’s ZPD mentioned above, establishes that children make advances in their play by interacting dramatically alongside a more skilled player such as the teacher.

Similarly, the influence of Vygotsky’s theories are also evident in more recent editions of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. NAEYC’s stance has evolved from the 1986 excerpt mentioned above, and currently describes a teacher’s intentional play facilitation as such:

In the dramatic play center, two 4-year-old girls are pretending to read menus. Maria, (the teacher) noticing that neither girl has taken on the role of waiter, takes notepad and pencil in hand and asks them, “May I take your order?” Over the next few days, more children join the restaurant play. Waiters set tables, take orders, give orders to the cook, and prepare checks for diners. Maria is an observant, inventive, and intentional teacher. Her intervention sparks fresh play, tempting children to take on different roles, enrich their social and language interactions, and use writing and math for new purposes. (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; as adapted from Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000).

Here the teacher joins the play of the children by taking a role in the child-initiated drama, pushing the story forward. From this shared understanding of play in the early childhood classroom, teacher-child interactions are meant to be intentional, or carefully thought out based on observations, and dynamic. Teachers’ involvement in play can occur along a wide spectrum, but the one thing they all have in common is the fact that teachers are no longer expected to simply observe, they are encouraged to engage in and scaffold the play of their students.

As the role of the teacher’s involvement in children’s play has shifted, so have the ways in which teachers are expected to interpret, provide for and possibly engage with

their students' play. What makes these expectations so unique is the active engagement it requires; beyond simply observing and toward actively thinking about particular learning goals and differentiated play-needs of students. Facilitating play in such an intentional way requires considerable reflection on teaching practices.

Teacher Reflection

Reflective teaching is a self-evaluative tool in which teachers observe their own practice: what works, what doesn't, and why. Over the past twenty years teacher reflection and self-evaluation has become a large part of both teacher education programs and professional development for in-service teachers. Corresponding educational research on reflective teaching has become more prominent, as well (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Leroux & Theoret, 2014; Pihlaja & Holst, 2013). Although reflective practice feels like a relatively new slant on teacher education, the theoretical foundation of this practice stems from the seminal works of John Dewey (1933) and Donald Schön (1983).

John Dewey (1933) examined the ways in which we understand how teachers choose to do what they do in the classroom, viewing reflection as the process through which teachers investigate problems in the classroom in a systematic way via underlying beliefs and knowledge (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Dewey states:

Reflection emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity, it enables us to direct our activities with foresight and plan according to ends-in-view or purposes of which we are aware, to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act. (1933, p. 213)

Dewey re-conceptualized the role of teachers' reflection from simple, everyday thoughts about classroom practice, to an active, curious and purposeful process aimed toward change.

Donald Schön (1983) took Dewey's (1964) ideas a step further, placing reflection within a particular moment of action. Schön argues that not only can practitioners think about what they are doing as Dewey suggests, (*reflection on action*) practitioners can also think about what they are doing, while they are doing it, (*reflection in action*) (Schön, 1983, p. 54). This simultaneous thinking while doing places emphasis on a teacher's capability to think on their feet and make appropriate decisions based on particular situations (Farrell, 2012). Rather than viewing these two theoretical viewpoints hierarchically, current research looks to find the various ways in which teachers, teacher education programs and professional development programs seek to utilize both reflection in action and reflection on action as a tool for assessment, and ultimately, change (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005 ; Leroux & Theoret, 2014; Pihlaja & Holst, 2013).

Another area of theory and research has juxtaposed reflective practice within the context of practitioners' personal histories. Geneva Gay (2003) states, "who we are as people determines the personality of our teaching" (p. 4), and certain works, mainly theoretical in nature, have reflected that sentiment. These works investigate and acknowledge the influence of personal histories on teaching, and the practice of self-reflection as an agent for pedagogical change. The perspective that teaching is an autobiographical act stems from the work of curriculum theorist William Pinar (1981), who pushed beyond the notions of reflection presented by Schön (1983) and Dewey (1933). Pinar shifts the focus of reflection inward, portraying the teacher as an active participant in teaching and learning, stressing the power of autobiographical study as an exterior lens through which teachers can examine their curricular tasks and make them deliberate. He states:

Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcised but are the very pre-conditions for knowing. It is our individual and collective stories in which present projects are situated and it is awareness of these stories, which is the lamp that illuminates the “dark spots” the “rough edges” (Pinar, 1981, p. 184).

Pinar’s (1981) theoretical work creates space for teachers and researchers to use their lived experiences as a tool for understanding and evaluating teaching practices. Every practitioner has a personal history that joins them daily in their professional practice, (Cole & Knowles, 2000) and these contextualized life experiences influence both teaching conceptions and teaching practice (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Convery, 1999). This framework, one that situates teachers’ personal histories as a powerful tool to help them understand and evaluate their own teaching practices (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger; 2004) will guide this study.

Review of the Literature

Consensus in the field regarding the role of the teacher in dramatic play has changed from a passive one to an active one, and this academic consensus informs changes we have seen in the guidelines that determine how teachers are trained to effectively provide for and facilitate dramatic play for young children (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009). In this literature review I will argue that it is not simply a teacher’s pedagogical choices in play that matter, but rather, the quality of those choices and interactions that have the most value. Quality places the role of the teacher at the forefront of what it means to facilitate for play in the early childhood classroom and also draws our attention to teachers’ personal perspectives on dramatic play. The failure to consider teachers’ perceptions of play through the lens of their own personal experiences constitutes a considerable analytical gap, and this gap, properly examined, could

potentially yield new insight into teachers' facilitation of and involvement in dramatic play in their classrooms. In order to understand this analytical gap, this review is broken down into three categories of focus that represent what it is we know about how and why teachers provide for dramatic play.

- The range of teachers' roles in dramatic play: There are a large number of studies investigating teachers' facilitation of dramatic play and the various impacts that those interactions can have on children.
- Sources of influence on teachers' roles in dramatic play: There are considerably fewer works that look to what drives play-based pedagogical choices in the classroom. Researchers have investigated the professional and personal lenses through which teachers are viewing and also navigating their decision-making processes.
- Teachers' memories of play: Within the literature on how teacher beliefs drive pedagogical choice, a third location for review emerged. A small amount of research has been devoted to uncovering teachers' memories of play as a means of understanding their perception of their students' dramatic play.

All three of these categories of research help us gain insight into how teacher facilitations are active negotiations of their personal and professional beliefs about dramatic play. However, research needs to go beyond the investigation of facilitative choice to more deeply address how teachers' personal beliefs about dramatic play shape the way teachers integrate themselves into classroom dramatic play.

The Range of Teachers' Roles in Dramatic Play

The purpose of this section is to review the research on the various roles that teachers can inhabit while facilitating dramatic play in their classrooms. Much like the ever-disputed definition of play (Bergen, 2014), there are many different ways in which a teacher's place in play has been categorized and defined, depending on the philosophical lens through which it is viewed and the context in which teachers' roles are taken up. While early play theorists Rousseau (1762), Piaget (1962) called for teachers to employ a light-handed approach to play, arguing that adult involvement in play would take away from its inherent developmental value, Vygotsky (1978) working through a psychological, socio-cultural lens proposed that play is only enhanced by the presence of others e.g., a teacher.

Sarah Smilansky (1968) took these two conflicting theoretical positions, and established categories of insider and outsider play interventions. While still presented as two very different approaches to play facilitation, Smilansky introduced a more practice-based codification of the ways in which teachers are involved in the play of young children. Outside interventions are defined as opportunities for teachers to extend learning via play from a distance, whereas inside interventions contain strategies to scaffold learning and harness teachable moments. For the purposes of this review the modalities for engagement in children's dramatic play will be categorized into these forms of teacher involvement: an **outsider**, who supports the play without actively participating, and an **insider**, who enters into and joins the play of children (Smilansky, 1968). Although a dated classification system for the myriad ways in which teachers engage in play, it is important to note that the field continues to view teacher-child play interactions through this dichotomy. Play facilitations are often categorized by the entry

points in which teachers choose to engage, and thus the current research on play exposes the often disputed, “mixed bag” of approaches practitioners are negotiating in practice and the many different ways teachers can choose to implement dramatic play in the classroom. In addition to the roles that teachers take up inside or outside of the play of young children, this section of the chapter will address research on the quality on teachers’ interactions with play.

Teacher’s role as an outsider. This body of research presents the teacher as a supporter of dramatic play from an outsider’s perspective; one that remains on the outskirts of the dramatic play as an observer. In this outsider position a teacher allows the play of children to remain relatively untouched, and does not disturb the flow of children’s play. This outsider role for teachers is supported by studies that look critically at the impact of teacher initiated interactions in play (e.g., Harper & McClusky, 2003; Gmitrova and Gmitrov, 2003) and offer solutions via studies on how to facilitate from outside the play (e.g., Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003). These studies all place importance on a teacher’s capacity to understand the value of independent dramatic play and to make non-intrusive decisions based on the play-needs of their students.

Research that supports the outsider role. By looking at the negative effects of a teacher’s presence inside the play of young children, two studies support the role of the teacher as an outsider in children’s play. Harper & McClusky (2003) found, through coded analysis of video recordings conducted during the free play period of an early childhood classroom in a University laboratory preschool, that adult-initiated play interactions were having a (perceived) negative impact on children’s play. Harper & McClusky found that after adult play, children were less likely to seek out play with other

children or take further risks in their play such as joining child only play, or initiating a new play scenario with a child.

The implication here is that once the child experienced an adult play interaction they continued to seek out the adult interaction rather than another child. The authors highlight the specific social impact of adult participation in children's play, and that every choice a teacher makes to enter play or not has an impact. Interestingly, what is missing from this study is a contextual understanding of why the teachers decided to enter the play of their students, particularly because half of the children had special needs. The study highlights the negative impact of a teacher's presence in children's play, but doesn't incorporate the voice of the teacher, and why they made the pedagogical choices they did.

Another study examined the impact of teacher led play interactions from an outcome-based perspective. Gmitrova & Gmitrov (2003) conducted a quantitative study that investigated the impact of teacher-directed versus child-directed dramatic play on cognitive competence by observing 51 children in a Slovak Republic Kindergarten. Data was collected to measure cognitive and affective behavior via Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of cognition, and researchers results demonstrated that when children were engaged in their own play scenarios rather than teacher led dramatic play, there was an increase in child behavior in cognitive domains. "Children think more, learn more, remember more, spend more time on task, and are more productive in well-implemented cooperative groups rather than directive, competitive structures of the frontal organization of the playing process" (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003, p.246). Gmitrova and Gmitrov suggest a teacher's presence within dramatic play can actually have negative effects on cognition.

These authors, (Harper & McClusky, 2003; Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003), propose that the presence of a teacher within the play has negative effects, and that the outside role is an ideal way for the developmental benefits of play, both social and academic, to shine through.

Research on how teachers facilitate from outside play. This research presents the “teacher as outsider” as one who has the opportunity to further his/her own understanding of his/her students, and to investigate ways to build upon dramatic play experiences that will extend children’s learning. In Hadley’s (2002) theoretical piece “Playful Disruptions,” he defines this role of the teacher as “outside the flow” (p.15) where the impact of the teacher is reflected through modifications or extensions of play rather than as an active agent within the play story. In this location of facilitation, the teacher remains the teacher, (rather than a player), and any modifications or interventions are meant to extend the play further, prompt discussion, or re-establish the play.

For example, in Korat, Bahar & Snapir’s (2003) qualitative study, the authors focused on one teacher’s observational practices within the dramatic play of 32 Israeli Kindergarteners. Researchers observed dramatic play sessions and used field notes, children’s artifacts and still photos for data analysis via three levels of outsider intervention: creating a print-rich environment; responding to children who initiate literacy-based questions; and planning a curriculum that embraces the written word.

Korat et al. portray the observing teacher as one who tries to understand the play, provide appropriate scaffolding and allow the students to make their own decisions. Researchers highlighted two dramatic play scenarios in which the teacher intervened by taking on a role in their play, finding that while facilitating dramatic play from an

outsider perspective, teachers can provide literacy-based guidance without exerting undue control (Korat et al., 2003) and that the decisions that the teacher made regarding when and how to become involved were very important in helping children arrive at their own solutions.

Other research has more deeply categorized teacher interactions located outside the play, such as Kontos' (1999) mixed methods study that recorded audio of 40 teachers' and assistant teachers' interactions with children during free play in 22 different Head Start classrooms. Researchers found that most often, teachers inhabited the role of "play enhancer/playmate," which involved talking with children about their play or as a "stage manager" in which teachers were helping the children get ready to play with props and costumes. Through their analysis of the data researchers found that most teacher talk during play involved either statements describing play ("That is a very big cake!"), statements involving practical or personal assistance ("Can I help you put on that coat?"), or questions supporting play ("Did you ask Katy if she wants to play?") (Kontos, 1999, p.369-371). The utility of this study is partly in its approach to the identification of teacher roles, but the major contribution to the field lies in the evidence-based classification of the *ways* in which teachers enact those roles outside the play.

Observing children's dramatic play provides a doorway through which teachers can evaluate whether or not to enter the play or remain an outsider (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2003), thus interacting (or not) based on the play needs of children in that dramatic moment. This 'outsider' mode of support for dramatic play is by no means restricted to simply providing space and materials for dramatic play and walking away. This is an active role for the teacher, one that requires high quality support. Researchers

posit that teachers should be able support children's play needs by inhabiting a mediator position, providing communication and translation, and thus re-establishing roles, clarifying meaning of action and language, and quelling disputes (Ashiabi, 2007; Van Hoorn et al., 2003).

Teacher's role as an insider. There is a growing body of literature and research that examines and supports a re-imagining of teachers' role in classroom dramatic play – here, the teacher participates as a co-player, entering the dramatic scenarios established by children and finding ways to guide the play from within. This perspective, that teachers should become more significantly involved in the dramatic play of their students, seems to fall into two locations in the body of literature on the topic.

First, the role of the teacher entering play is increasingly approached as an opportunity to provide locations for “playful learning” or “guided play” (Hadley, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). “Playful learning” is achieved in and through activities in which children are involved in spontaneous and pleasurable activities that are also goal oriented. Here teachers are “subtly directive, embedding new learning into meaningful contexts that correspond with children's prior knowledge and experiences” (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p.24). Playful learning can take on many forms, for example, a teacher taking on a role, or helping to reframe the play to meet an academic goal. This focus on learning and play may be a result of the play/academic conflict mentioned in the introduction of this paper and the reality of increasing academic pressure in the early childhood classroom (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Second, the role of the teacher entering play is approached through a collaborative, socio-cultural lens. By examining the co-creation that occurs when teachers

step in, the research highlights how teachers can engage with dramatic content in their classroom to enhance the experience for both teachers and children. This literature identifies ‘insider’ teacher play practices as something that allows for a deeper understanding of children; and the beneficial outcomes that can occur when teachers enter the dramatic play of their students as a player (Lindqvist, 2001; Logue & Detour, 2011).

Research that supports an inside role: Playful Learning. There has been a considerable amount of research examining dramatic play as a tool for learning – mostly represented in research studies that measure student outcomes (e.g., Bergen, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; Johnson, 2002; Roskos & Christie, 2000). Considerably less research focuses on the teacher, and the pathways through which playful learning can be achieved. The research around playful learning theorizes teachers as not only making active curricular choices for academics to be filtered into dramatic play, but also facilitating the play of their students through thoughtful guidance and co-play.

The work of Jones & Reynolds (2011) is an empirical study embedded in the teacher-focused book “The Plays the Thing.” This text provides a body of data about interactions between children and teachers around dramatic play. The authors conducted a long-term qualitative study investigating the play interactions between teachers and children in a community college setting and a Head Start/child care setting. The extensive time spent within the classrooms of these two schools allowed the researchers the opportunity to observe various modes of participation in situations where teachers entered the play of their students. From this depth of data, the authors created a categorization of pedagogical identities. These identities fall across a spectrum, providing

examples of how much (teacher as player, teller, mediator and scribe) or how little (teacher as communicator, stage manager, and planner) they might be involved. Regardless of the actual practice covered by these categories, all of the roles identified by Jones and Reynolds require careful preparation and attentive participation on the part of the teacher. Jones and Reynolds pay particular attention to the co-playing teacher discussed above. For these authors, a co-playing teacher becomes an active participant by taking on an imaginary role within the dramatic play, and actively engages in the dramatic discourse therein. In this study, the playful learning benefits of the co-playing teacher role are supported by evidence that when teachers are involved as a character within a story created by children, teachers then have the opportunity to model roles and provide new perspectives that support academic growth.

Hadley (2002) articulates this co-playing teacher role in a primarily theoretical piece in which he describes observations of an early childhood teacher who enters the dramatic play area in-role after observing a teachable moment. The children playing waiter and waitress are writing down orders, without actually delivering those orders to the chef in the kitchen. In order to clarify the issue, and re-enforce the value of written text, the teacher assumed the role of a customer, and initiated an interaction that drew children's attention to the written texts (Hadley, 2002, p. 14). Hadley identifies this interaction as the teacher engaging "in the flow" (p. 14) of the play, and goes on to explain these types of interactions as "complex risky business" (p.15) even for the most experienced of teachers. Through their entry into the play, teachers can walk the line between their own academic goals and a play-based curriculum by making deliberate facilitative choices that meet their classroom needs.

Research on how to facilitate from inside play: Co-creation. In Lobman's (2005) chapter, *Improvisation: Postmodern play for early childhood teachers*, she stresses the importance for teachers to co-create with their students. She describes the value of going on a playful journey with your co-players, and allowing yourself to say yes to the playful offers that are provided by the children in your classroom (Lobman, 2005, p. 271). The studies reviewed in this section look to teachers' engagement in play as a means of both deeper understanding of the play lives of your students, but also to create alongside them.

Lindqvist's (2001) case study investigates how children create meaning when they see adults taking on roles in dramatic play. Lindqvist's research puts the Vygotskian theoretical perspective into action through the establishment of *Play Worlds* – a dramatic experience shared by teacher and students, typically revolving around a form of literature. Lindqvist entered dramatic play with children as a researcher by participating in scenarios alongside students from two early childhood classrooms (from 1-3 years of age). Through these interactions, Lindqvist concluded that the ideal purpose of the teacher is to facilitate the meaning making that can occur through joint story telling. The author assigns this role based on the identification of the teacher as a skilled co-player whose role is essential in “dramatizing the plot” and moving children into more meaningful play.

Another way of engaging in the co-construction that can occur through dramatic play is to allow for and inhabit the roles that may need defining. In the teacher research piece “‘You Be The Bad Guy’: A New Role for Teachers in Supporting Children's Dramatic Play” (2011), Logue and Detour used journal entries to describe their interactions with twelve 3-4 year old children in a series of potentially harmful play scenarios in their university-based preschool classroom. Initially, the authors remained

outside the play, only intervening when safety was an issue. As play themes evolved, the teachers found themselves drawn into play that they had labeled earlier as “disruptive and inappropriate” (Logue & Detour, 2011, p.12); in these situations, they were being asked to take on the role of “the bad guy.” Teachers observed that by examining the “bad-guy” play contextually, they understood dramatic play themes from a different perspective, and thus recognized that in the past they may have inhibited what could have been potentially valuable play for children. Logue & Detour imply that by entering the play in-role, they were able to deepen the meaning of the “bad guy,” which not only adhered to the children’s interests, but also allowed the children to distance themselves from the role in order to understand it better.

Quality. As mentioned earlier, the insider/outsider role for teachers in classroom play has been historically presented as an ‘either-or’ decision to be made. Current research on teachers’ roles carry on that framework for understanding teachers and play; there is some research that argues a teacher’s interference in play is detrimental (Sutton-Smith, 1990; Brown & Freeman, 2001; Harper & McCluskey, 2003) as well as other research that encourages deeper teacher interaction within the play of young children (Bennett, Wood & Rodgers, 1997; Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). Interestingly, the literature presented via this dichotomy of inside or outside the play reveals that teacher-child interactions in play are actually quite fluid. Teachers pick up or put down play roles with various levels of teacher involvement depending on the pedagogical goals of the play. Additionally, I would argue that this dichotomy (insider vs. outsider) is a false one, and that it is not actually a question of the efficacy of entering the

play or not, but rather a question of how teachers enact these roles, and the quality of the interactions themselves.

Quality in early childhood education is defined as the environmental aspects of a classroom that have an influence on social and academic outcomes (Love, Meckstroth & Sprachman, 1997). Typically, quality is thought of in two ways: Structural quality and process quality. Structural indicators of quality are aspects of early childhood classrooms such as class size, teacher child ratios, staff qualifications etc., while process indicators of quality such as teacher-child interactions and relationships encompass the actual experiences in an early childhood classroom (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006; Cassidy, Hastenes, Hansen, Hedge, Shim, & Hastenes, 2005; Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early & Barbarin, 2005). When the quality of play in early childhood classrooms is considered, it is typically investigated as a measurable structural variable, i.e., space, materials and time provided for play (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). The more process based variables of play quality like the behavior of teachers and their provision of activities for children, present a challenge for measuring quality, because they involve personal interpretation and are thus more difficult to measure and regulate (Howes, Phillips & Whitebook, 1992). The intersection of teacher-child interactions and play represent a process based marker of quality that has not been empirically studies until recently.

Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot's (2011) study “‘Good-fit’ teacher–child play interactions and the subsequent autonomous play of preschool children” began to interpret different levels of quality play interactions. The authors tested a model of teacher-child interactions by categorizing children’s play needs and teacher responses to

those needs as a way of understanding what makes for ‘good fit’ play interactions.

Through their extensive 20-week qualitative study recording and observing the teacher-child play interactions of eight early childhood professionals, Trawick-Smith et. al found that when teacher-child interactions in play are specifically tailored to the individual play needs of young children, this will eventually lead to more independent, child-directed play in the classroom – the implication being that when teacher interventions are carefully thought out and implemented effectively, children’s play is enriched.

In a subsequent chapter in the *Handbook of Early Childhood Education*, Trawick-Smith (2012) further clarified variations of teacher approaches to play: the trust-in-play approach, the facilitate play approach and the enhance-learning-outcomes-through-play approach. The trust-in-play approach takes on a more traditional view of play--that a teacher’s involvement in play does not improve on its developmental value. The facilitate-play approach involves adult intervention in order for play to have the most value; here teachers are thought of as active supporters of children’s play. Finally, the enhance-learning-outcomes-through-play approach is a location in which teachers have very intentional academic goals in mind as they engage in play (Trawick-Smith, 2012, p. 260). Trawick-Smith presents these approaches as contradictory in nature, but also challenges the reader to think of the value behind a blending of approaches by stating that in order for teachers to interpret and engage in play effectively they must ask themselves two questions: “1) How much support do children need at this moment in their play? and 2) What learning outcomes, if any, can be enhanced in these play activities?” (Trawick-Smith, 2012, p. 266).

The work of Trawick-Smith (2011; 2012), begins to explore the intersection of

quality teacher-child interactions and play, and supports the notion that the quality of teacher-child play interactions is of the most importance when considering the value of classroom play. When teachers engage from outside the play in a supporting role, to inside the play as a member of the play community, the reviewed research suggests that both levels of interaction are valuable for a number of reasons *when implemented effectively*. In the 9 reviewed studies on teachers' possible roles in dramatic play – (Gmitrova and Gmitrov, 2003; Hadley, 2002; Harper & McClusky, 2003; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003; Lindqvist, 2001; Logue & Detour, 2011; Trawick-Smith & Dzuirigot, 2011) – some of these words and phrases were used to describe teachers' pedagogical choices: skillful, well thought out, intentional, carefully planned, clever, and sensitive. These words reveal the need to recognize that it is not a matter of *if* a teacher chooses to enter the play or not, but rather, it is the quality of teacher child play interactions that is of more importance.

Moving forward with the assumption that the quality of teacher engagement in play is of considerable import, and “teacher performance makes a difference to how well children play during the early years” (Johnson, 2014, p. 184) it is imperative that we learn more about how teachers interpret the interactions that occur around play. What motivates one teacher to participate in dramatic play in one way, and another teacher to participate in a very different way? One way to gain some perspective on the motivations behind individual teacher's dramatic play pedagogy is to consider how current research literature describes the relative importance of different sources of influence on teachers' understandings of, and roles in, play.

Sources of Influence on Teachers' Roles in Dramatic Play

The distinct pedagogical choices mentioned above don't come without their own set of influences that may alter how a teacher engages with dramatic play in the classroom. The purpose here is to explore research that has been devoted to the lenses through which teachers view the role of dramatic play in the early childhood classroom, and how those perspectives have an influence on implementation in practice. From a professional standpoint, the literature presents an area of influence from the field at large, and from a personal standpoint, the influence is more localized, stemming from social and cultural contexts. At the intersection of the personal and the professional contexts in the teachers' conceptual interpretations of play that informed by both history and practice.

Professional. The field of early childhood education has generally accepted theoretical and cultural conceptualizations about play that establish expectations regarding how teachers facilitate and provide for dramatic play in classrooms (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner & Yarnall, 2001; Fleer, 2003; Lubeck 1998). This has been explored in a number of studies that provide insight into how teachers understand dramatic play professionally in two ways: how teachers were educated about and theorize play (Bauml, 2011; Brashier & Norris, 2008; Logue & Harvey, 2010; Wood & Bennett, 2000), and the degree to which play is valued in a particular school's academic culture and, more broadly, in national policy (Brown & Freeman, 2001; Erikson Institute, 2003; Miller & Almon 2009; Olsen & Sumsion, 2000; Stipek and Byler, 1997).

The mostly qualitative studies exploring the relationship between teachers' education and their notions about play are based on responses from teachers regarding the

(professional) educational experiences that have shaped their practice. In two of these studies (Logue & Harvey, 2010; Wood & Bennett, 2000), teachers explicitly identified their training as a direct influence on the way they engage with play in the classroom. Furthermore, in a study by Bauml (2011) of five first-year Kindergarten teachers, all relied heavily on their university coursework to guide their decision-making process with regards to dramatic play.

The Logue & Harvey (2010) mixed methods study is possibly the most significant when viewed within the context of this paper. Due to its ability to encompass multiple areas of inquiry, the researchers touch upon all three areas of influence highlighted by this review. In “Preschool teachers’ views of active play” (2010), 98 Pre-K and Head Start teachers were surveyed about the play in their classrooms. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers responded that the greatest influence on their attitudes about active play was their coursework in early childhood education, 41% of the respondents cited their own childhood experiences as the most influential factor, and 32% of the teachers surveyed cited the beliefs and attitudes of their co-workers as the source of most influence (Logue & Harvey, 2010, p.45). This study presents the influence of teachers’ personal and educational experiences on their perspectives on play is considerable, but more pertinent to this study, this study acknowledges the considerable weight a teachers’ childhood experiences has on their personal views of play.

In their qualitative study exploring early childhood teacher practices in dramatic play, Olsen & Sumsion (2000) look to the ways in which practitioners interpret their own provision of dramatic play in their classrooms. After in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis involving four Kindergarten teachers from Wales with various

teaching backgrounds, Olsen & Sumsion (2000) developed a list of factors that influence teachers' decisions about dramatic play. Among them were the principals' expectations, curriculum requirements, time and collegial support; these factors demonstrate the number of ways teachers are influenced on an institutional level when making decisions about how they facilitate dramatic play. The surveys of Logue & Harvey (2010) captured one first-year teacher's similar sentiment, quoting: "I would love to incorporate more dramatic play in our curriculum, but because of the academic demands of the school system, I find it extremely difficult to incorporate it...as a first-year teacher, I find myself greatly influenced by the demands of the administration" (p.41). According to the research presented here, teachers make pedagogical play choices in a response to how play is presented and valued, through their own personal educational experiences, and through the larger systematized conceptualizations of play as well.

Personal: A decision-making process that stems from cultural and personal contexts. In addition to the professional sources of influence on what teachers know to be good practice when it comes to dramatic play, there are also the personal and cultural contextual factors that influence teacher beliefs about teaching, childhood and play. In their development of a teacher belief Q-sort (a research method used to study personal viewpoints), Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta and La Paro (2006) established a conception of teacher beliefs, through which the relationship between personal, cultural and professional variables becomes apparent:

Teachers' beliefs: (1) are based on judgment, evaluation, and values and do not require evidence to back them up, (2) guide their thinking, meaning-making, decision-making, and behavior in the classroom, (3) may be unconscious such that the holder of beliefs is unaware of the ways in which they inform behavior, (4) cross between their personal and professional lives, reflecting both personal and cultural sources of knowledge, (5) become more personalized and richer as

classroom experience grows, (6) may impede efforts to change classroom practice, and (7) are value laden (p. 143).

This conceptualization is reflected in research studies that have investigated how teachers' personal and cultural beliefs have an influence on how they provide for and facilitate play in their classrooms, and how these beliefs have been identified as both a tool and a barrier for changes in practice (Wilcox-Herzog, 2003).

Two recent studies investigated play in several different countries as a means of understanding early childhood education across cultural contexts. In Tobin, Wu and Davidson's *Preschool in Three Countries* (1989) and later in Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa's *Preschool in Three Countries: Revisited* (2009), the authors took a longitudinal, in-depth view of the culture and practices of early childhood classrooms in the United States, China and Japan. Using video ethnography as their methodology, Tobin et al. (1989) described a variety of perspectives on play and childhood through different cultural lenses.

In a similar collaborative study titled "Play and Learning in Early Childhood Settings: International Perspectives" (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2010), data collection spanned seven countries, in which researchers from each country followed and videotaped at least five children throughout their day in an early childhood setting. Viewing this data through a socio-cultural lens and analytical framework (Rogoff, 2003), the authors explored the meaning of play as interpreted through various cultures and contexts, as well as how teachers work within these various contexts to support that meaning.

These case studies, in which perceptions of play were analyzed through personal, intrapersonal and institutional lenses, revealed that although teachers' attitudes about the positive impact of play were consistent cross-culturally, the ways in which teachers saw their role in play varied based on the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they were located (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2010). For example, authors found that in Australian case studies, the privileged purpose of play was social development, and teachers maintained an observational role because they felt that best facilitated the children's social development; in American schools, the role of the teacher was more thought of as a curator of the play, there to ensure or guarantee the social and academic value of the play. In China and Chile, however, the prioritized function of play was to support learning and facilitate academic growth, and in order to accomplish this, the teacher's participatory but also directive role in play was much more significant (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2010, p. 183). This literature provides evidence that personal and cultural context influence teachers' approaches to dramatic play, but does not give us analytical access into how such influences are lived out through teaching practice.

Interpretations of Play A teacher's overarching interpretation of play and its meaning is defined, in part, by the personal and the professional sources of influence as referenced in the works reviewed above. Teachers' pedagogical choices are influenced by both their personal and their professional lives, which is both driven by and a result of a conceptual understanding of what play is and should be. Not unlike the variety of ways in which teachers can engage in the play of their students, there are a variety of ways in which teachers can interpret and therefore enact and talk about play. Jo Ailwood's 2003

conceptual piece, “Governing Early Childhood through Play”, she introduces a categorization of the ways in which play discourse occurs in the early childhood literature: a romantic/nostalgic discourse, a play characteristics discourse and a developmental discourse. These locations for thinking and talking about play, create a space for understanding the various ways in which teachers think and talk about play on both personal and professional levels. *Romantic/nostalgic discourse* usually is based around storytelling, and the ways in which dominant ideas about play in this vein are typically portrayed as idyllic positive experiences. *A play characteristics discourse* is framed as talk about play that encompasses the characterization of play behaviors, for example, intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, or social. *A developmental discourse of play* stems from the ways in which the field has interpreted the work of Vygotsky and Piaget via what is considered to be Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009), and the role of play within the cognitive, social emotional and physical development of young children. These modalities for thinking and talking about play are the embodiment of both the personal and professional influences in teachers’ lives. They are way of valuing play through multiple lenses, and ultimately, these types of play discourse become informers of and informed by a play pedagogy.

When pedagogical choice is viewed through a system of professional and personal beliefs, the teacher is revealed to no longer be simply making choices for play; rather, they are actively interpreting personal and cultural cues on institutional, cultural and personal levels. The field represents these levels as sources that influence how a teacher enacts and implements available modalities for dramatic play in the early childhood classroom. While the literature provides a significant amount of evidence of

such influences from a socio-cultural and practice-based perspective, there is still more to be learned about what drives teachers' personal belief systems regarding dramatic play. There is more to be learned about something that every teacher possesses, no matter the level of education or socio-cultural background – an individual teacher's personal experience of dramatic play.

Teachers' Memories of Play

Studies from the past two decades have looked at individuals' play memories as a way of examining types of play, and materials for play, but no studies were conducted with early childhood professionals (Henniger, 1994; Linde'n, 1999). The early research on memories of play sampled non-practicing early childhood education students, and did not address the impact of memories of play in the classroom. In Henniger's (1994) study featured in *Early Child Development and Care*, 95 university students in various early childhood education classes (most of them middle-class, white and female), responded to a five-question survey (during class) in which they were required to remember and draw their favorite childhood play experience. Subsequent probing questions were used to gain more details about the play itself: who they played with, what materials they used, whether they were indoors or outdoors, etc. From the sampled survey data, Henniger found that students recalled outdoor play with found or adapted objects as being the prominent materials and locations for play, and that most often play occurred with groups of friends, siblings or peers. This study looks to the memories of students rather than those of practicing professionals (Henniger, 1994), which leaves a gap when looking to apply this phenomenon to classroom practice.

More recent works involving students and teachers examine play memories through a phenomenological lens. In A. Sandberg's work "Play Memories from Childhood to Adulthood" (2001), and in the subsequent article "Play Memories and Play Identity" (2003), the research contains a similarly flawed methodology to the work of Henniger (1994) mentioned above. In "Play Memories from Childhood to Adulthood" (2001), Sandberg used a sample of 478 students, asking them to think about how they played in various stages of their childhood and draw a picture that represented that play. After the drawings were created, the participants worked in groups to organize and categorize their play memories on flow chart paper, and to answer a series of questions about their memories, covering such topics as: who was involved in the play, where play occurred, what risks and chances were taken through play, what physical and fantasy play occurred, what complexity in play occurred, what interaction occurred, and what memories of flow did they have of their play (Sandberg, 2001). Sandberg found that participants placed importance on fantasy and "place" play in the 3-6 year age group, interactive and physical play in the 7-12 range, and risky and flow-based play as having the most presence in the play memories of 13-18 year olds. From these findings, Sandberg implies that teachers need to be aware of the impact that these play types can have at various developmental stages, and as a way of looking at the importance of play in the curriculum (Sandberg, 2001). The study does not take the next step to investigate these personal experiences through a pedagogical lens, partly because of the nature of the sample, but also due to limited data collection. The studies of Henniger (1994) and Sandberg (2001) view play memories as stagnant rather than active variables that impact how teachers provide for play in the present. The data collection limits their experiences

to a drawing or a closed ended questionnaire, which, rather than allowing for a full representation of how these individuals experienced play, simply establishes categories of play that have been remembered within a specific developmental stage.

In their study, “Preschool Teachers’ Play Experiences Then and Now” (2003), Sandberg & Samuelson improved upon earlier methodological shortcomings regarding sample and interview design. They interviewed 20 preschool teachers selected through conscious criteria that were developed to ensure “variation regarding gender, age, childhood environment, siblings, own children, years of education, and work within municipal and private preschools” (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003, p. 4). The interviews covered a variety of topics, and were open-ended to provide more room for deeper discussion. The interviews were focused not only on teachers’ memories of play, but also their perceptions of how children play now as compared to their own childhood.

Researchers identified certain aspects of play that were valued by teachers through their own reflective processes, and established two categories that defined these views: 1) an idealized perspective in which participants viewed their own play as the ideal, and the standard to which they held other children’s play experiences and 2) a pragmatic view, in which participants saw no difference between the way they played as a child and the way their students currently played (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003, p.17). Interview transcripts in which teachers provided examples about how they played as children, and their comparisons to their current classrooms supported these categories. The framework developed by Sandberg and Samuelson was also utilized in a study conducted in Greece by Doliopoulou & Rizou (2012) that found similar results and focused on how teachers interpret what is lacking in children’s play through the lens of

their own childhood memories. These more current research studies (Doliopoulou & Rizou, 2012; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003) present a reflective process for teachers to compare their own childhood play to the play of the students in their classrooms, a process that creates space to expose teachers' opinions about children's play through the lens of their own experience.

Teachers are no longer expected simply to provide space and materials for the play of children, but instead teachers are now encouraged to be much more active and engaged in children's dramatic play. If teachers are expected to understand the myriad ways in which children engage and interpret meaning in play as well as the varied pedagogical approaches available to them as a facilitator, it is equally important to acknowledge the ways in which teachers themselves interpret and make meaning of play. Acknowledging that perhaps teachers need to be reflective of their own values and attitudes toward schooling and play advances our thinking of teachers as not simply vehicles for delivering content or materials, but rather living breathing participants in the educational process.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore and describe teachers' personal play histories and how they relate to their facilitation of, provision for, and perceptions of dramatic play in their classroom. These histories were framed by three research questions that sought to illuminate whether and how teachers' personal relationships with play intersect with their current practice:

- How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom?
- How do teachers interpret play both personally and professionally?
- How do teachers facilitate for play?
- How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play?

Research Design

The theoretical works mentioned in Chapter Two (Dewey, 1933; Pinar, 1981 & Schön, 1983) provide support for the notion that when teachers are placed at the center of curriculum and pedagogical development, focus is drawn to the lived experiences of classroom teachers (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). "Lived experiences" are conscious, accessible life memories, or a general awareness of our past (van Manen, 1994). Lived experiences can encompass many areas within the context of a teacher's life, but for the purposes of this study the focus remained on teachers' experiences with play over the course of their lifetime. The aim of this study was to collect teachers' memories and their perceptions of the play that occurs in their classroom, and therefore, a narrative approach was chosen in order to capture participant's play histories as a phenomenon and as an individual experience. To explore these experiences through the lens of teachers' individual

understandings as well as the context at hand, the primary source of data was the teachers' own words.

Although the term narrative can sometimes be reduced to “story”, many qualitative researchers from differing disciplines have developed other definitions for narrative research, each with particular data collection and analysis methods within the genre. The one commonality across disciplines is the role of the researcher as the shaper of the narrative-- finding meaning within the story and linking it to the context at hand (Riessman, 2008). For the purposes of this project, the definitions and research practices of narrative study drew from the traditions of the human sciences—the interpretation of multiple modes of inquiry related to the human experience (Polkinghorne, 1983; Riessman, 2008). In this framework, the personal narrative encompasses “long sections of talk—extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research interviews” (Riessman, 2008, p 6). Narrative research provided a platform for the telling of teachers' “play stories” as well as a space to reflect and collaborate, co-creating player identities as they pertained to classroom practice. First order narratives (Elliott, 2005) were collected and interpreted through the collecting of stories and the reporting of individual experiences (Creswell, 2013), but in addition, the “story” continued to emerge through the collaborative dialogue that took place between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2013, p. 71).

To determine the possible depth of such a project, a pilot study was conducted in 2014 consisting of interviews and observations of three Pre-K teachers in a public-school setting. The pilot study primarily focused on teachers' personal experiences with play, and yet the participants in the pilot study actively engaged in professional reflection

through their engagement with the research process. Through an ongoing dialogue, teachers identified a distinct personal “player identity” and a “teacher at play” identity. These two distinct personas were introduced and explored through the storytelling of each of the teachers, and re-enforced in both their observed classroom practices, and personal reflections on teaching practice. After completing the study, a new area of interest revealed itself for which a broader range of data would be collected in an attempt to capture a more holistic interpretation of the teachers’ lived experiences. This study sought to capture not only the play history of the teachers, but in addition, the professional reflections of the participants as they participated in the research project. When teachers were asked to recall their past, and use it as a lens to examine their own current practice, the data became an active reflective process. A narrative approach provided a “beginning, middle and end” to the story of each teacher in this process, illuminating their past and a look at their own practice through a personal-historical lens.

Setting

This research study took place at a private lab school at a small college in the Northeast. The nursery school opened in 1927, and continues to be a source of early childhood education for the children of both the faculty and staff of the college and the community at large as well. Additionally, the nursery school is a location for adult learning where college students and faculty can make use of the school for research and academic purposes. The school’s philosophy contains four cornerstones by which their standards of quality are marked. These tenets of quality range from providing developmentally appropriate child centered environments and curriculum, to nurturing meaningful child-adult relationships via educated, experienced staff.

This educational setting was chosen due to the abundance of early childhood classrooms in one location, with a curriculum and daily schedule that were consistent throughout each classroom. This allowed for the research to focus on the differences between the teachers. This was a convenience sampling as well, due to the location of the facility, and a previous educational relationship with the school.

The school's accredited curriculum is aligned with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice and the International Association of Laboratory Schools (IALS). This play based, integrated curriculum is structured around themes generated by children's interests.

The school contains five classrooms, with various age groupings and staff configurations (See Table 1), and a fairly consistent curricular philosophy and daily schedule across the age groups. Each of the classrooms devote between 45-60 minutes of their day to free play. Head teachers employed by the nursery school have their Bachelor's or Master's degrees, and assistant teachers have their Associate's or Bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or related fields.

Table 1 <i>Setting age groupings and staff configurations</i>				
Classrooms	Age Range in September (years)	Number of students (maximum)	Number of teachers (T)/assistant teachers (AT)	Amount of indoor free play per day (approx.)
2-3	2.0-2.8	7	1 T /2AT	55 Minutes
Mixed Age	2.9 – 4.9	9	2T/1AT	45 Minutes
3-4	2.9-3.9	10	1T/2AT	45 Minutes
4-5	3.6 – 4.9	18	2T/1AT	60 Minutes
Kindergarten	4.9-5.9	9	1T/1AT	60 Minutes

Sample Selection

A purposeful sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) of four early childhood teachers were recruited from the staff of the nursery school. Four “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) cases were purposefully chosen as focus subjects to assure a varied sample based on personal demographics and teaching experience (Cresswell, 2013). This was achieved in three phases. Phase one involved a meeting with the director to allow for any recommendations, and insights into the sample selection. In Phase two, the director of the school provided an introduction to the teaching staff, where information about the study was provided. In phase three, the director was asked to provide each head teacher with a questionnaire (See Appendix A). This document provided detailed information about each teacher so that a broad representation was selected based on specific criterion: willingness to participate, age, years of teaching experience and geographical background. Age and geographical background were of significant importance because of the various ways in which childhood play is enacted depending on the places one lives (suburbs, rural, urban) and the possibility that older participants may have played with different materials than younger participants. Additionally, the questionnaire collected information about cultural and socio-economic background. From the information gained from the questionnaire, four very different, yet “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) cases were purposefully chosen as focus subjects to assure variety within the sample (Cresswell, 2013).

Data Collection

Narrative data is not simply the stories of the research participants, but a collaborative process in which the researcher participates in the shaping of the stories (Riessman, 2008). The text of the narrative for this study consists of stories told by the

participants and my interpretation of these stories (Riessman, 2008). Data collection took place during the 2017 school year over the course of three months. Dates and times of data collection were determined based upon participant availability, and classroom scheduling. Data was collected in three ways: semi-structured interviews, a focus group and field observations of the teacher during classroom free play. These modalities for gathering information and answering the research questions came from a variety of sources that were designed to elicit open ended reflections about the intersections of childhood play and professional practice (See Table 2).

Table 2 <i>Data collection and research question alignment</i>				
Research Questions	Interview 1	Interview 2	Focus Group	Field Observations
How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom?	X	X	X	
How do teachers interpret play both personally and professionally?	X	X	X	X
How do teachers facilitate for play?		X	X	X

How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play?		X	X	X
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Semi-structured interviews. The goal of the narrative interviews were to provide a platform for rich, detailed accounts of each participants' personal experiences rather than simply broad answers to general questions (Riessman, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the interview was a location in which teachers explored their play history and player identity via their personal stories about play. These field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), were not simply recounted events; they were also active interpretations and constructions of identity as players and as practitioners via their storytelling. Deeper than anecdotes told in passing, the data contained "narrative in context" (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 123), placing the talk of the participants within a framework of themes and ideas.

Each teacher participated in two semi-structured interviews and one informal email dialogue. Interview #1 was prior to the classroom observations and focus group and took place over the course of one hour during a participant designated time, following the developed interview protocol (See Appendix B). A follow-up email was sent to check in with participants to see if any additional thoughts or memories had emerged since the interview. The email conversation was considered narrative text. The second interview took place approximately two-three weeks after the focus group to create space for

further reflection on the teachers' part (Seidman, 2006), and also so that the teachers had a chance to immerse their reflective experiences within the context of their work, or what is defined as *reflection in action* (Schön, 1983) (See Appendix C).

Both interview protocols were developed to reflect the research questions regarding the personal and professional experiences of the teachers, but also to allow space for participants to make meaning within their answering of the questions. In regard to the narrative interview, Riessman states: "It is preferable, in general, to ask questions that open up topics, and allow respondents to construct answers in ways that they find meaningful" (2008, p. 25). To that end, the interviews were open ended and conversational in nature as a means of establishing the process as both relational and collaborative (Josselson, 2013).

These interviews were audio-recorded using one recording device. Memos were taken before, during and after the interview, and notes were taken to capture body language, or environmental observations as well as post interview reflections. The interviews were then transcribed in the following weeks to prepare for coding.

During their interviews, all of the participants painted the portrait of an idyllic setting; one in which children are playing with one another until dusk, and there is no tension to be found within the play. This "polished" remembering of the past is not uncommon (Boym, 2002). This could be because of the pressure of working with a researcher and having these memories recorded, or it could simply be that when we look back on our childhoods we see them through idealized, rose-colored glasses (Harris, 2017). I have honed my focus on what the teachers have chosen to share—and interpret them as reconstructions situated within the context of the study and the process of storytelling

(Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Riessman, 2008). These re-constructions are more valuable than what may or may not be the “full picture” of someone’s childhood, as they are what was being offered by the participants, and what was ultimately used as a lens for examining practice.

Field observations. In order to describe teachers’ classroom play practice, broadly focused classroom observations lasting an hour took place over the course of the project. Observation sessions occurred twice during the study, one prior to the focus group and one post. These observer-as-onlooker (Patton, 1987) field observations were directed at the action and dialogue of the teachers within the daily scheduled “free play” practices of each classroom involved in the study. Observations adhered to the research questions that addressed the pedagogical practices of the teacher: how they interacted (or not) with the play of their students, what roles they took up as a facilitator, what dialogue was occurring in the play space at this particular time? Detailed field notes were collected for the duration of this period in conjunction with an observation check list (See Appendix D).

Focus group. According to Krueger and Casey’s 2000 text “Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research”, (as cited in Patton, 1990), “Interactions among participants enhance data quality. Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other which weeds out extreme or false views” (p. 386). A focus group session was conducted involving all of the study participants and myself. The basic goal of the focus group was to unearth and discuss what it was teachers recalled about playing *as* children, and what it is they observed about playing *with* children in practice. This was achieved in three ways: 1) *Play histories*. Teachers were asked to share a specific play memory they

had while taking part in the first interview. The goal of this portion of the day was to begin a community dialogue that illuminated collective play memories and ignited excitement and pride in their individual play experiences. 2) *Practice*. This portion of the focus group was devoted to investigating the role of play in the classroom. The teachers engaged with one another to discuss what they saw as the goal of play in their classroom, what struck them about their students play, when they chose to engage in play activities, and what role they took in those moments, (co-player, mediator, guide etc.). This portion included excerpts from my field observations in the classroom so that teachers could reflect on specific facilitative choices they made. This *reflection on action* (Dewey, 1964; Schön, 1983) provided teachers with an opportunity to collectively examine their classroom practice. As a participant observer in this focus group, I was taking field notes, and audio recording the encounter.

Data analysis

Narrative data can be analyzed thematically, structurally or dialogically depending on the context of the study (Cresswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008), and thus, the unit of analysis shifts according to how the data is to be interpreted. Narrative thematic analysis focuses on “what” is spoken in the text of the data, rather than “how” or “why” (Cresswell, 2013, p.192; Riessman, 2008), and so the story content is the unit of analysis, interpreted thematically to explore player identity.

The participant’s pasts coupled with their own interpretation of their practice and the reflective process tells the “big story” (Phoenix, 2013, p. 72) created by and through the research experiences themselves (Labov, 1982). Data collected through interviews, the audio recorded focus group and classroom observations were organized according to the

individual sources, and then re-storied chronologically to create a through line within the context of the study. This “re-storying” of personal experiences was the re-organization of collected data in a chronological form that placed the narrative of the participant within a framework connected by overarching links, themes and ideas (Cresswell, 2013, p. 74).

Analyzing individual cases. First, the transcribed data was read and coded using broad, a priori codes to establish different areas to be re-storied chronologically by individual. The codes: childhood play, adult play and teacher play were used to classify the key “plot points” in the play history of the individual. Next, the data was re-organized to reflect a chronological through line (Cresswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008) in which relevant text was re-ordered to create the biographical “play storyline” portrayed in Chapter Four-- beginning in childhood, extending through their teaching experiences with play and ending with participant’s experiences in this research process.

The data acquired from field observations were used to support or contradict participants perceptions of their own play facilitations and were added to the text of the narrative. This data was coded using a priori codes as established in the literature review (for example in the play/out of the play) to determine the various locations of play facilitation. Once that coding was completed, more detailed emergent codes were implemented to identify the specific tasks, roles and identities that teachers took up during the free play portion of their day. The themes that developed from this coding process were then examined within the context of the narrative of the participant, and folded into her story.

The data is represented according to each individual's play story, and written in narrative form. Understanding the collaborative nature of narrative research, the creation of the play stories was a "flexible and evolving process" (Cresswell, 2013, p. 221; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in which participants were actively involved. The goal of the stories shaped by the researcher was to look backward and forward, encompassing a three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) exposing a meaningful pattern within each participant's play life, and a holistic view of the participant.

Analyzing across cases. Based on an a priori coding scheme, the practice based data of each individual was organized by the type of reflection taken up by the participants, as defined in the theoretical framework in Chapter Two (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). *Reflection on action* (Dewey, 1964; Schön, 1983), was defined by the thoughts and musings that teachers shared about their practice and the ways in which they currently engage in classroom play. *Reflection in action* (Schön, 1983) included instances in which teachers shared examples of the moments in which they made particular facilitative choices based on the play needs of their students in that particular moment. These codes were insufficient organization formats for understanding the nuanced ways in which teachers talked about practice through the lens of their own experiences.

More specific emergent codes were needed to understand the common experiences within the sharing of a history with play, as well as the common experiences of participating in this particular reflective practice as it pertains to pedagogy. The codes around processing a history with play (preference, re-creation and role taking) were thematic in nature and in direct relation to the *experience* of sharing a play narrative and developing a player identity. The codes around participating in this particular reflective

practice as it pertains to pedagogy (concepts of play, examination of play practice and identifying locations for change) were created to further understand the practice-based data within the context of this particular reflective process.

Weekly “theorizing memos” (Miles and Huberman, 1994) were written and shared with participants through the duration of the study as way to consistently speculate upon possible themes that may arise in the data collection process.

Validity Procedures

The nature of this project did not create space for generalizations or empiricisms, the aim was simply understanding the experiences of others. Regardless, certain procedures took place to assure validity. The formats for data collection, (interviews, field observations and focus groups), established a triangulated data set in which multiple and different sources and methods were used to examine themes (Creswell, 2013).

Throughout the narrative process, consistent member checking was sought in two ways as a means of providing an opportunity for the participants to maintain an active role as both actors and interpreters of the data collection and writing process (Stake, 1995).

Within the data collection process open conversations were held in regard to the themes that emerged, and my own interpretation of said themes. Within the writing process, participants were asked if my interpretation and ordering of their personal memories and experiences were congruent with their own. Additionally, the lines of communication were open throughout the research process via email for additional thoughts and reflections; as a key part of narrative research is the collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants. The teachers involved in the research project had a considerable voice throughout the data collection and writing process, thus providing a

validation check to the analytical process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Methodology as Pedagogy

In order to capture the varied play lives of four individuals, the data collection process was multi-faceted. The three spheres of their play experiences: child play, teacher play and adult play were woven together collaboratively via deep meaningful conversations about play. To achieve this, I worked alongside the teachers individually, and in a focus group to evoke memories of the past, but also to carry those memories into our conversations about practice. What was most striking about this methodology was the ways in which the power of narrative inquiry was so dynamic. In sharing stories about play, the individuals were actively experiencing two reflective formats: lived experience and talk of lived experience. In other words, the story telling process was illuminating for me as a researcher, because it created a multifaceted character; one who experiences play on a multitude of levels, and one who is building a narrative about play in the moment.

As shown in the interview protocol in Appendices B and C, I began the individual interviews by collecting the basics first--where they were born, their family history, and the geographic locations in which they spent their time as children. Next, I used the environments of their childhoods, to evoke certain aspects of their play. I asked each of them to walk me through their childhood home, stopping every now and again to gain thicker detail about play materials and play areas that the participants would mention. As the participants immersed themselves in their childhood worlds, the details of their play scenarios would emerge, and with my guidance discoveries were made.

In co-creating a special corner of these individuals' lives, I was privy to big and little play moments that only they could share. This process strengthened a relationship between us based in the magic of childhood, and the personal values each of us has for play. Ultimately, I re-shaped the narrative of each of the participants by interpreting what they chose to share with me. By placing myself within the process of the living and the telling of each individual's experiences with play, I was able to co-create the play stories found in Chapter Four. Additionally, by using this triangulated format of narrative inquiry I was able to both understand and study the experiences of the individual (Clandinin, 2013), and later use those experiences to frame classroom observations and the focus groups.

The focus groups were a location in which the participants came together to share their memories and experiences with one another. The community created by the participants in the focus group was a playful one, in which each individual experience was voiced and valued. Together, the participants reminisced and laughed about play materials they enjoyed as children, and how they view each other as playful individuals within the context of their work. I facilitated this by using their play stories as a jumping point for conversation, as well as using my classroom observations as a framework to talk about practice.

My Role as a Researcher

I entered this research process as a player. I have engaged in playful activity my whole life: playing in the woods as a child, as a theater student and professional actor as a young adult, and as a teacher in the classrooms of young children. As a researcher, I sought to tell the play stories of others, with the understanding that they will be different

than my own experience, but knowing that my perceptions and definitions of play will be present throughout the process. To maintain a firm grip on this bias, I kept a journal throughout the research process, recording my own thoughts and feelings about the data, as well as my own musings about play and my childhood experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In my processing of the work of this project, I often thought about my own childhood play, and how and when they aligned with the experiences of the participants of the study. I felt myself engage with the joy of the telling, and often had to hold back from joining in to the conversation about my own adventures in play. In that spirit, what held the most meaning for me as a player and as a researcher, was the privilege of co-creating such a special place with the participants; one in which the reminiscence and nostalgia was infectious.

CHAPTER FOUR: PLAY STORIES

This chapter contains the play experiences of four early childhood educators. Each of the participants' interview data was chronologically "re-storied" to portray each individual play trajectory and highlight the aspects of their childhood and adulthood that they chose to share (Cresswell, 2013, p. 74). This was achieved in two phases: the data was read and coded using broad, a priori codes to establish different areas to be re-storied chronologically by individual. The codes: childhood play, adult play and teacher play were used to classify key points in each individual's history. Next, the data was re-organized to reflect a chronological through line (Cresswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008) in which relevant text was re-ordered to create a play storyline. Four narratives are shared in this chapter, each containing two sections that delineate a history with play: the child at play and the teacher at play. The sections titled "the child at play" represent what the participants chose to share about their childhood and their experiences with play. It begins with a vignette based on the participant's first-person narratives. These vignettes are italicized in order to delineate the third person prose. The section titled "the teacher at play" represents the participants' experiences with play within the context of the classroom. It begins with a vignette based on my observations classroom practice, which is italicized to delineate between my observations and the narrative of the participants.

This analysis and organization provided an opportunity to understand the variety of experiences that were represented within this group of practitioners, but also the common threads that join them. Each individual narrative is titled with a name that was informed by the stories that were shared and agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. This chapter is meant to honor these experiences with play.

Play Stories

The Puzzler

The child at play. *It is Sunday. Megan is tucked away in a corner of her grandparent's apartment on the Upper East Side in New York City. She has come into the city with her Mother and Sister to go to church, but now, finally, she is able to sit down and play with her grandparent's Matryoshka doll. The kitchen is noisy, filled with sounds of food being prepared and animated discussions in Russian, but Megan has found a quiet space. She peers at the doll, an old man holding a staff, who she imagines is a priest or a monk. Opening the nesting dolls one by one, Megan sticks her nose deep inside their halves to breathe in the musty, yet comforting smell. She then lines the re-formed dolls next to one another, from largest to smallest. Megan leans back and admires her work. Smiling.*

Megan was born in 1961, in a small town in South America, although her story does not begin there. Megan's grandparents were born to nobility at the turn of the Russian revolution in Moscow. As life in Russia became more and more complicated, Megan's family moved gradually westward, landing in Austria, where Megan's mother was born. Eventually the work of her Grandfather brought the family to Argentina, and then a coastal town in Peru where Megan would eventually be born. A year and a half later the entire family moved to New York City; Megan's sister was born soon after, tucked into a stroller that would roll across the slanted apartment floor. Life in New York City was brief, but full of experiences with extended family, grandparents and great grandparents alike, trips to Central Park, and eating aromatic chestnuts with her Grandfather. Megan lived with her family in the city until she was around the age of four,

and at that point Megan her mother and her younger sister moved to a small town in a county just north of the city that held a strong Russian Orthodox population. Home, or “the bungalow” as Megan fondly called it was a tiny house on a busy street in the northern part of town that spread along the Hudson River. The house had a huge backyard facing down the hill toward the river with trees for climbing and space for her Mother to plant a garden.

A majority of Megan’s play life existed in the areas in and around her home. She shared many of these play experiences with her younger sister, (by two and a half years) in the hours after-school. Afternoon activities were left up to the girls because their Mother worked two jobs and would typically be gone until the evening. After coming home on the bus, Megan and her sister would make their way along the busy road that led to their house, carefully ambling behind the guard rail to avoid oncoming traffic. Once home, they would check in with their mother on the phone, “forage” for snack and then get down to the business of play.

Barbie was a priority. Due to their mother’s discomfort with Barbie’s stature, the girls would play with “Casey and Francine” Barbie’s less top-heavy cousins. Megan and her sister would create play scenarios in which the dolls had dates with John and David, the resident teddy bear boyfriends, because their mother wouldn’t allow Ken dolls in the house. In our conversations, Megan often said that doll play was her preferred form of dramatic play with her sister. She claimed she did not have the imagination or patience for pretend play in which she would take on a role and that although sometimes she would go along with whatever story her sister wanted to play out, it was not something she remembered enjoying:

I cannot stand pretend play, my sister was very much into pretend play herself, you know she would dress up in scarves and put tights on her head and those were her long pigtails--she had a wild imagination. And she just played whimsically by herself, because I rarely, rarely joined in, if I did it was with the dolls.

Megan would sometimes acquiesce, and go along with her sister's dramatic play scenarios; becoming a teacher because "she was the eldest", dragging out books crayons and papers to hold class. She often described their shared dramatic play as "directed" by her sister, who typically demanded to be a ballerina, in any given dramatic context.

Megan also found great joy in other types of play. Although she had fond memories of running around outside, climbing the trees in her yard and a profound love of snow, she characterized her most pleasing childhood play scenarios as quiet and indoors. She discussed her love of books and puzzles quite often, describing her family as a group of puzzlers:

We were a very wordy family, we loved puzzles. Very, very big on jigsaw puzzles that was from my grandmother, my mother, myself and my sister were all incredibly, almost obsessed jigsaw puzzlers. Yeah, very good at it.

A lot of the play that Megan enjoyed as a child could be described as cerebral. She gleefully described a particular week home sick from school during which her Mother would go to the library after work and bring home armloads of books. There, sick on the couch, she would devour each book one by one, and await the next delivery that evening from her Mother who also happened to be a "big reader" as well.

In our time together, Megan shaped the identity of a player who was influenced by family, captivated by certain activities and repelled by others—a childhood spent within her particular context-developing opinions, preferences, and ultimately choices about how she chose to play.

The teacher at play. *Megan approaches a table with three young children and a pile of lids and caps from recycled trash. She settles in quietly next to them and “takes in” the materials in front of her. “I like to be able to see all the caps” she says. Megan is organizing, experimenting and playing along-side them as they chat about various things: her kids, food, caps etc. She has created a rainbow of caps—arranging them according to color. “Here’s my rainbow! Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple”. I find out later that Megan has collected all of these recyclable items (hundreds of colorful caps and lids that fill a laundry basket) from her home. As I observe Megan in the classroom, she spends a good ten to fifteen minutes at this table quietly chatting and organizing lids and caps. She engages children in her play by asking questions and conducting her own experiments: “which one (lid) will hit the table first; “oh! You know what I like about this? The sound...that (lid) is the loudest... (whispers) that (lid) is the quietest.” Megan has found a seat at this table in which she seems to genuinely engage with the materials in a curious and playful way. She begins to create a tower of the lids and as she builds she narrates her actions the children around her who are watching in awe. “I’m trying to see how far I can stack it before it falls down. It looks a little wobbly, but it’s still standing up... If you race while you build things it will fall down...you build with slow careful movements”. Even as Megan leaves the table to attend to other classroom business, the children continue to experiment with the unique materials she has provided them with. Later, Megan will choose to join the table again, and return to her work. Her studious, quiet, intentional play-work.*

Though Megan graduated with a B.A. in Math and Economics, she discovered early that banking was not for her. On a whim, she took an assistant teaching position at a

nursery school and immediately fell in love with teaching. She enrolled in a teaching program and graduated within one calendar year. When I asked Megan to reflect on her education, and how play and early childhood were presented to her as a graduate student, she shared that she was involved in a program that was considered “liberal” at the time. Her schooling focused on educating the whole child with an emphasis on play—a philosophy she carries with her still:

It’s about meeting the child where they are, following their interests, sparking their creativity, their love of learning, their love of books. And when ... because I like working with the little ones, it’s all about learning how to be a person, a good friend, a ... you know it’s not really all about learning your A, B, C’s.

Before landing at her current position, Megan took various teaching jobs in private preschools and substitute teaching positions, all the while raising a family. She has been teaching at this school full time for the past four years. Megan is the head teacher in the 3-5year old afterschool program at the school. The model of the program requires a themed curriculum, and that planning lands with Megan. The afternoon begins outside in the play yard, and then eventually moves indoors for a circle time activity, and then various play centers.

Every time I enter the classroom I am struck by the calm that Megan exudes during circle time. The children are watching carefully as she shows them a book about salamanders. “I used to catch bright orange salamanders at camp when I was little”, she says while leaning over to give a child a closer look at a picture. Later, as the children have made their way to various play centers, Megan moves slowly from table to table making commentary on the play that is happening, eventually settling down with some waffle blocks. “You see how the waffle blocks have three sticks on one end and two on the other? The three side always sticks with the two side. (She shows him how to get

them to fit together.) See? Now it fits perfectly”. She later shared: “... I guess it's an interest in physics. I love building with them. I love playing marbles with them. Those are the things I enjoy. And sorting and playing with manipulatives. That's my thing”. Megan’s interest in puzzles, games and building was apparent in most of her interactions I observed in the classroom. She was quick to share her strategy for organizing puzzle pieces by edges and shapes, admire how a child was sorting manipulatives, or help a child to build a structure that could contain little play animals.

As Megan discussed her role as a teacher at play, she continued to express a dislike of dramatic play in which she was to take on a role:

I don’t like pretend play, it makes me crazy and when students of mine say, “Pretend you’re the momma cat and blah, blah,” I'm like, “No, go find your own friends to play momma cat,” I just don’t like it. I don’t have the patience for it, I guess, I don’t know why. I mean, I don’t want to squash their thoughts and things, but I don’t feel like that’s my job to do with them.

This sentiment was evident in her classroom practice as well. She maintained a strong presence in many of the other areas of the classroom, but did not seem to engage with children in the dramatic play area of the classroom unless necessary. Two children begin to play in the kitchen area of the dramatic play corner and eventually find them-selves having a sword fight with two fake “spears” of asparagus. Megan reminds them, “We don’t really like to play with swords at school—it’s dangerous”, and moves on. Although Megan was not an active participant in the dramatic play in the classroom, she was keenly aware of what was going on. A child put on a pair of star-shaped sunglasses, to which Megan exclaimed, “Oh you look like a movie star!”

Megan is a confident, warm, engaging teacher. She clearly has a preference of what she chooses to engage with in the classroom. Megan’s fondest childhood play

memories represented a very particular type of play— but even more significant, her narrative radiated warmth, pride and history.

The Character

The child at play. *It is well past noon, and Jane has been in a tree for hours. High in the Japanese Maple in her yard, Jane peers down at the ground and kicks her sneakers off--they fly to the grass below and land with a thud. Now, un-encumbered by footwear she maneuvers from branch to branch and, ignoring her Mother's demands to stay low in the tree, climbs higher. Pretending to be Barney the dinosaur (a popular childhood television icon) who also happens to be fighting off pirates, she yells at imaginary enemies, threatening them with walking the plank to certain death. With the grace that only a six-year-old has when climbing a tree, Jane makes her way to her "perfect spot" and settles herself against the curve of the trunk of the tree that fits her precisely. She digs into her shorts and pulls out a little plastic container that holds "Polly Pocket", a miniature doll with stretchy clothes for dressing. She quietly dresses and undresses her a few times before becoming aware of the approaching pirate ship, and so she prepares for battle.*

Jane was born in 1992 in a suburban area outside a major US city. Her parents were 21 and 25 when she was born and they separated soon after, when Jane was around 6 months old. Throughout her childhood, Jane's time was split between two locations, often moving from house to house in each locale. "About every year of my life, I moved; whether it was with my dad, or my mom, or both of them." Jane spent the week with her Mother in various locations in the suburbs around the city and eventually she spent weekends with her Father about an hour away beyond the state border. These two

locations became the space for very two very different childhood experiences. Jane often discussed their contrast, not only in the physical environments in which her childhood occurred, but also the ways her parents interacted with her, and the social relationships she developed in each area.

Most of Jane's time with her Mother was spent in and around their home and in the thickly settled part of their street with houses situated quite close to one another. Jane's Mother eventually remarried when she was around eight years old, the family was joined by her brother when she was ten, and her sister at twelve. From Kindergarten to the middle of second grade Jane was at a school where she not only felt like she belonged as a social member of the play community, she identified herself as a leader within the play lives of the neighborhood children:

I was known as the little mayor of (name of school). I remember on the playground, with all the kids, you know they start to form their cliques? And I remember telling everybody, I was like, 'I'm playing with everybody. You guys want to play with each other like that? Go play by yourself. Otherwise, we're all playing together.'

Jane often discussed her Mother's choice to later switch schools from the local public school to the Catholic school in the area, and the impact of that shift. When discussing the move, Jane shared memories about the difficulties she faced and the challenges of integrating into already established social system.

The play experiences that took place at her Mother's house were primarily solitary in nature-or involved a small group of friends. Jane's Mother worked multiple jobs at various times in her childhood, so often Jane was left to play on her own. She recalled waking up and getting her own bottle from the refrigerator and putting in a favorite VHS tape to watch while her mother slept in after a late night at work. She

described her Mother as strict and somewhat of a worrier. For these reasons, the play that occurred at her Mother's was often close to home.

Every Friday Jane's Father would pick her up in the early evening, and she would spend the weekend in the landscape of a different kind of suburbia. Sprawling lawns and a sea of housing developments perched on an isolated hill provided ample space for Jane to explore on her bike alongside her neighbors. Jane's Father was much more lenient when it came to her play activities, "...my dad was a bachelor and had his daughter come every weekend, so he was kind of like, you know, he's taking a break too. 'Go do whatever the hell you want. I don't care.'" It was here where Jane's social play relationships became much more important and something to depend on. "Because I moved around a lot more at my mom's, I didn't have that group to kind of go back to. Every weekend, I had that group at my dad's house to go to. I knew that later I'd be playing with Holly and Beth". Jane described the joy of knocking on doors to see who could come to play, riding bikes, and exploring the neighborhood with groups of children until dinnertime.

These two distinctly different play environments shaped Jane's memories in a significant way- but the play that was contained in these spaces did not differ greatly. Jane's connections to the imaginative world and the characters that inhabited it were constant in her memories of childhood play. Dramatic play with dolls, or taking on roles from popular media were a huge part of Jane's play-life no matter which parent she was with. "Barbies. Barbies. Period, end of story. I was a Barbie girl". Jane described all the various ways in which she would use the Barbies as characters from popular media, and act out scenes while watching television. "You know, I mean I'd be playing, but the TV

would be on, too. So, we're playing with my Barbies, we'd have our own thing going on; but "Boy Meets World" would be on, too, or whatever. So maybe they'd become Angela and Topanga (characters from the show) or something". Jane's play with Barbies, or "Polly Pockets" (miniature dolls similar to Barbie), often represented characters from movies or television-- "her playmate" that she would be watching in the moment. The Barbies would have fashion shows, or have a girl's day and laze about the giant three-story Barbie Dream House that Jane owned.

When spending time with the neighborhood children at her Father's house, or playing alone at both locations, characters from popular media were represented in Jane's imaginative play. More often than not, Jane chose to take on a role that was present in current movies and television. "I've noticed that my -- me, I'm very movie and TV...a lot of my play comes from what I've seen and stuff like that". Whether Jane was using a bow and arrow her father taught her how to use to pretend to be Legolas from Lord of the Rings, or dressed in full costume as Queen Amidalia from Star Wars preparing for a light saber battle, Jane's connection to media had a considerable impact on the ways in which she engaged in dramatic play as a child. "I watched movies way too much. No, honestly, way too much. I would pretend to be different characters in the different movies, depending on who I was with. I mean, if I was by myself, it didn't matter. I would play anything, I really didn't care".

As Jane got older, she began to play more with another type of media--video games. Her father was "really into computers" and taught Jane how to navigate games like "The Oregon Trail" and "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?" She described that impact of spending time lost in a computer game connected to the movies and the joy

she felt while engaged in an alternate reality. As she aged out of those types of games, Jane became interested in “The Sims”, a life simulation computer game in which you create an environment with characters in it, and simply play around with these characters within an established setting. Jane connected with the game on both an imaginative and creative level; she was hooked:

There was one time where my mom – six hours went by and she was like, ‘Dinner’s ready.’ And I was like, ‘What? Dinner, already?’ And she was like, ‘Yeah. What have you been doing in the basement?’ And I was like, ‘I’ve been playing “The Sims.”’ She’s like, ‘The whole time? Six hours you were playing a computer game?’

Jane talked about how her Mother limited her access to the game, whereas her Father allowed her to play as much as she wanted--which was considerable. Jane mentioned that even now as an adult, she enjoys the game-- “I downloaded it immediately, and I still play that. I have so much fun with it”. Jane’s love of character play found a happy home in the “virtual dollhouse” world of The Sims, as well as the character driven computer games of her earlier years. When Jane interacted with technology or other types of media, these interactions were based in a fascination and a love for the characters involved in the stories she engaged with.

Jane shared a love of dramatic play. Through dolls, miniatures, role-play or gaming Jane’s character play was usually defined by characters found in popular media. Jane’s capacity to find playful space in the “other than” is a representation of not only the childhood zeitgeist, but the particular play environments she found herself in at the time.

The teacher at play. *Dinner is served in the dramatic play area. Jane is seated awaiting her meal. Children surround her, furiously rummaging through the various spaces where play food is kept. The sounds of busy meal prep fill the room: plastic plates*

clattering against each other, waitresses discussing the customers choices with the cooks and Jane's demands. A child rushes a cup of pretend water over to her, "Water? That's it? I'm hungry!" Jane is simultaneously playing and socializing/talking with co-teachers and myself. Somehow, it is established that they are eating in the desert. A student teacher seems to try to push the play a bit by asking for a table for one. Jane doesn't pick up that offer—and continues with her storyline, "I think I might need gallons of water... What am I eating today? Dinner? Can I have some chicken and potatoes and green beans?" Jane's commitment to the drama at hand is impressive, to the point where I can't help but wonder if this is how Jane behaves in real restaurants "What am I eating? Just a bun? Ok...can I have some butter? It's a little dry". Jane is genuinely invested in the meal at hand, and the children are thrilled.

Jane's path to teaching had always been fairly clear. As a young girl, Jane was often drawn to her teachers as social partners rather than the children in her class. She would often remove herself school activities to sit with the teachers, watching them carefully and hoping to take over. She recalled thinking "Oh I can do this...This I can definitely do." And she could. She was trained as a teacher at a local community college, and honed her practice through a variety of impactful field placements in and around the area. Although her schooling took a bit longer than expected because "life took over", Jane found that she was comforted simply walking into a classroom. "Every time I walked into the classroom with kids, I could put life aside, and I was just *in* with the kids. I was all kid, you know, all the time...I want to be in there. I want to be engaged and everything". This energy and engagement with children coupled with good timing led her to securing her current job after achieving her associates degree.

In discussing the role of play in the early childhood classroom, Jane briefly identified the philosophical similarities between her teacher training and her current place of employment—specifically, “play being the center of all learning”. Interestingly though, when Jane explored the role of play in the classroom she typically framed it within her commitment to and engagement with the children’s play. Jane related to herself as a dramatic player, showcasing the ease with which she not only engages with the dramatic play of young children but *enjoys it*:

I feel like play totally defined me, and it still kind of does because I am a player. I don’t like to sit back and watch, unless I’m tired, but I like to be like totally involved with the kids... And I really enjoy it, you know? I really do. I like getting silly. I like being funny with these guys and everything and go home when the day is done, but we all had a good day and it was really fun.

Jane’s ability to commit to the dramatic reality of the children’s restaurant play in the passage above, demonstrates her capacity for full play engagement, taking up the offerings of the students, therefore investing deeply in their play. This investment has its own sort of payoff; the children swarm to Jane while she plays—they are entranced by this adult figure who is picking up the plot line of their play and extending it; not for any academic purpose or to direct their play; but for the sheer enjoyment of the play itself.

Jane is lying on the rug with another child with frog miniatures and building a house for frogs. “I have to protect my frogs from predators” she says as she builds a wall out of blocks around her frog house. All of a sudden, a child roars a loud threatening call, alarming the architect. “Oh, my goodness dinosaurs are here- I don’t know if my frogs will be safe in the house—uh-oh, there goes the roof!” The child’s eyes widen and his face breaks into an ecstatic grin and begins to slowly stomp closer and closer toward Jane’s structure. Jane is nervously gathering her frogs around her and building a wall as

fast as she can, as three more children join in the Dinosaur's path of destruction. They are vibrating with excitement. They attack: "Oh my goodness yikes! He just pulled my house apart! My frogs better wake up! My froggies are getting eaten! Oh, hop away hop away!"

The characters from popular media that fascinated Jane so deeply as a child remain significant for her still, both in and outside of the classroom. Her knowledge of current child-based media has come to be a source of pride for Jane as an educator; something that makes her stand out from the other teachers and a valuable authority for character play. "I always pretend, with the movies, they'll (the children) talk about a movie and I'll do the quote from the movie because I just know that movie really well, so then I'm pretending to be whatever character that was". Jane's character knowledge in its various forms and her eagerness to engage in this type of play is rooted in her past and evident in her preferences for classroom play, "I relate to it" she says.

The Explorer

The child at play. *Kara is running. She is running through the woods as fast as her seven-year old feet will carry her. Her lungs are burning as she sucks in the air around her. Tearing through the brambles, Kara pays no mind to the massive amounts of burdocks getting stuck to her sweater, and focuses on her footsteps, 1,2, -3,4, the cadence of a horse galloping. The smell of moss, dirt and rotting logs leaves her nose as she approaches the hill behind her house and her expectant mother who has called them all in for dinner. Turning back quickly, she catches a glimpse of her brothers, who are gaining on her in the unspoken race to get to the dinner table first. She is slightly disappointed that they have been called in, (even if they had been out all day), mainly due*

to the fact that they had decided to climb up onto the roof of the tree house the boys had built, a first for this group. She quickly brushes away the disappointment and pays it no mind, because now, she is a horse. She vibrates her lips, rears up and thunders down the hill for what smells like meatloaf.

Born to a European Mother and an American GI Father, Kara's roots run deep in two very different parts of the world. She was born in Europe in 1951, the first girl, joining her parents and two older brothers. A large portion of her family's early years were spent all across Europe, (each child born in a different location), until ultimately landing in a major European city for the birth of the youngest, another girl. They stayed there through Kara's first year of Kindergarten, and then headed to the United States, landing in a rural part of the Northeast, near her father's family.

The house where the family lived for most of Kara's childhood was built in the 1700's. The house with a small stable for horses rested atop a hill on three and a half acres a few miles out of town. Their home was surrounded by a thickly wooded area that was a source of great joy for Kara. Deep woods for hiking in, filled with skunk cabbage and marsh land for mucking around, ponds for skating and a tree-house built by her brothers.

A large majority of Kara's childhood play was located outdoors. Warm weather days were spent deep in the woods surrounding the house and winter days held exploration of ponds for skating, the building of snow dragons to ride on and snow forts to build. She mentioned on multiple occasions that she was a member of the generation who were told "Go out and play", sent out for the day and not expected back in the house except for meals. She often reminisced about the innocence of this time and remarked

that kids don't play that way anymore as a reflection about things not being as safe, but also a shift in the way that parents allow their children to play. This acknowledgement of the passage of time and nostalgia for the way "things used to be" often led to comparisons of her childhood to the lives of her students. "Never would I allow that in today's world. But it's different. But we had free rein. The four of us could go off in the woods by ourselves. My parents thought nothing of that". Kara lamented that children today would never be given the freedoms she had, walking deep into the woods, learning to swim simply by jumping in the water, and taking on jobs.

Kara, alongside her sister and two brothers also spent time playing in the horse stable "doing chores". Like their Father, all the children were riders in the local horse club run by their grandmother and were expected to pitch in and care for the horses, Beauty and Dixie. These chores were transformed (as they often are by children) into play scenarios:

Those stables had to be mucked and mucked. But we loved playing up above. You'd go up a little ladder, and you're up in the hay bales. That was fun. We'd hide in there – a lot of hide and seek and that kind of thing...We would climb on the roof and then jump in, if there was hay or straw available. Sometimes, there was manure fights. You were a little gamey. I mean, you can never forget why you took so many baths. Well, that was why. My mother was like, "Ew."

The kids would often watch as the horses were cared for. Kara had a stump that she liked to sit on while she watched the Ferrier work, or when the woman came to braid the horse's manes before a show. The horses, and the activities around the work to keep them, became a source of playfulness for Kara and her siblings, and often a theme in her play. She recalls putting on her Father's huge riding boots and flopping around in the house in them and making her Barbies ride horses. This identification of her family as a

group of “horse people” was a common theme throughout Kara’s discussion of her childhood and it was reflected in the way she talked about her activities both playful and work related and her connections to her older family members like her Father and Grandmother.

Outside where they had “free reign” the explorers set to work; Kara talked about how when play involved her brothers, it was always an exciting adventure. Crashing through the woods alongside her brothers and sister, pretending to be animals or explorers, hopping rocks and getting into some “very active play” was a typical day in the wild with her siblings. Where ever her brothers went, she wanted to go too, whatever they could do, she could do too; even if it meant getting involved in some risky play:

There was a lot of roughhousing with the brothers. Then they’d get bored with each other, then they would come after my sister and I. If they did something we didn’t like – well, “I’m going to tell.” – then we were called tattletale. But that seemed to be our only defense, because they were just bigger and stronger – a lot of rough and tumble play.

In the summer, the family would head north to the family camp in the mountains the outdoor adventures continued. Kara shared vivid descriptions of summers on the lake, learning to swim (“I’m talking not where today, everything is so structured and you get swimming lessons”) and canoeing with her Father. The camp was rustic: washing clothes on a washboard in the lake, outhouses and an icehouse to keep the food cold in the warmer months. Far from any sort of semblance of a town the four children were kept busy canoeing, swimming in the freezing water and jumping onto precarious rocks along the shoreline. Kara and her younger sister slept in the “far” cabin, holding hands while they drifted off to the sound of peepers and the water lapping at the shore of the lake.

Although Kara talked of other types of play including Barbies with her sister and putting on shows for the adults pretending to be Marilyn Monroe, a large part of our conversations revolved around the outdoors and the adventures that would take place there.

The teacher at play. *Kara is in the dramatic play area that is staged like a tent. She is covered in children. They are cozied up to her as she flips through the pages of a book about the desert, pointing out the different pictures and making commentary. “Don’t lean too close to this picture!” she exclaims pointing to a picture of a cactus, and she pretends to be pricked by the cactus in the book, “Ow! Is there a first aid kit? It’s getting red and bumpy! I need water to put on it.” A child scurries off to get water, but is distracted by the group of children forming under the tent, preparing to go to sleep. They are squealing with the excitement that goes along with playing under a sheet. “Snuggle city!” Kara says. She takes up their story line and extends it to the theme of the play area; “It’s getting cold, do we need a blanket? A sandstorm is coming, it’s blowing on the tent roof.” The children’s eyes widen as she covers them all up by floating an additional sheet up and over their bodies. It is very cozy looking. “Goodnight” she whispers, and backs away from the play.*

Kara began her academic path studying design in a large city which she soon discovered was not for her; the noise and the people were too much. “I’m not a city person, which I found out loud and clear through living in the city!” She ended up attending a state university close to home, graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in art education. At that point Kara shifted her focus to family and had three children “every two years”, but continued to take classes throughout that period. When her youngest child

was in nursery school, Kara took a part time substitute job at a lab school at a small nearby college—the same as the study site— and was asked to join the school full time. She said yes, enrolled her daughter at the school and continued to finish her Masters in early childhood. She has taught at this school ever since.

In talking with Kara about play and the curricular philosophies she encountered in her teacher training she often mentioned the role-taking that goes on in children's play that often mirrors the world around them:

Playing is doing. Playing is learning. I always thought it was kind of interesting, because you go in the dramatic play area, and the children take on the roles of – their parents are who in their world – what they see happening. It makes sense, but I might not have thought that way until I took some more early childhood development courses and teaching courses. There's a lot of curriculum in grad school.

Kara viewed children's role taking to be of particular interest and her place as a practitioner within that play was to observe, support and provide the necessary questions and tools to move the play forward.

This was clear in the interactions I observed in Kara's classroom as well. While immersed in the play of the children in the class room, she remained Kara, the teacher, but within the given play circumstances in a supporting role. Kara's careful attention to not only her teaching goals, but the play's purpose was evident in her facilitative choices and the way she assessed the play needs of her students in any given moment:

It's a way for the children to try on the roles. Where the teachers' role comes in is, how do I help them extend this? Mom or dad goes to work. They use a phone. They drive a car. How do they get there? What do they actually do where they are, and what props can I bring to that? What language can I add to that? What books can I bring in to enhance those experiences?

In many of the play scenarios I observed, Kara “provided the glue” (Paley, 1986, p. 123) for the children, tying together the dramatic threads that they had already established and

connecting their play to her current curricular themes and teaching goals. While Kara held a “teaching” role when immersed in the play of her students, she often removed herself shortly after adding the glue, in order to allow them space to play on their own.

Having been a teacher at this school for 28 years, Kara has seen changes in the way children play, but also in the way she, as a practitioner, is given space to “explore” alongside the children. In discussing the amount of time that teachers and children need to physically be in the classroom, Kara mentioned that with the influx of services offered to children they don’t have as much freedom to explore spontaneously. “It’s wonderful that there are support services, but we can’t just wander out ...there are limitations. That’s just ...what it is. But it makes me sad. I’ve lost a little freedom as a teacher”.

The Maker

The child at play. *Sara/Indiana Jones, is traveling through a system of tunnels in the basement. Her sisters are screaming with the excitement of the chase as they careen through the cardboard maze they have created out of leftover supplies from their Mother’s factory job. Sara quickly exits the boxes and grabs her flashlight, shining a beam of light through one of the many holes they have cut in the sides of the tunnel, to create additional drama. “Agggghhhhh! Look out!” She yells, shaking the boxes and strobing the light by wagging the flashlight back and forth. The younger girls squeal and race toward the exit, hoping to make it out before something drastic happens. Sara clicks off the flashlight and the tunnel goes dark. “What’s happening?” she whispers, “What’s going to happen next?”*

On an American island off the south-east coast in 1987, Sara was born, joining her Mother, Father and older sister. They lived there until Sara was four years old and

they decided to relocate and “start a new life”; moving to a town on the outskirts of a small industrial city in the eastern part of the United States. Here, the family was joined by Sara’s younger sister, but unfortunately, shortly after her birth Sara’s parents split up and her father made his way back to the island from which they came. As a result of this upheaval, Sara’s mother and girls moved to a neighboring town, and together they began to make a life for themselves in their new home. From the age of four until she was nine years old, Sara and her sisters lived with their Mother in a townhome apartment complex outside of town with connecting yards in the back, and a cul de sac for riding bikes in the front.

Sara’s early play life existed in and around this home. She spent the majority of her playtime with her sisters and neighborhood kids, as well as the grandchildren of a nanny that would watch the girls while their Mother was at work. Sara’s Mother, (who was single during this early period in Sara’s life), despite having a college degree from back home, worked in a local factory to learn the language and support the family, often working nights. The girls were not allowed to travel much beyond the house and the small yard, and so the majority of Sara’s play memories from this time are inside. The house had two bedrooms upstairs, a living room and kitchen on the first floor and a basement that held all of their toys and packaging materials leftover from their Mother’s work at the factory.

Sara and her older sister were quite close both in their friendship and their age. From first grade through high school they were in the same class, participated in the same activities, shared a bedroom and were, as she put it, “really, really close”. Eventually their younger sister was old enough to join them in their play, ripe for “a little teasing and

sibling rivalry”. It was during this period of time, living with just her Mother and her three sisters, that Sara remembered playing primarily indoors with her sisters.

Down in the basement where the Barbie dream house was located, was the locus of play for Sara and her sisters. Surrounded by concrete walls and all of their toys, Sara and her sisters would play for hours, creating adventure after adventure for themselves, using whatever they could get their hands on:

We would play with boxes, because it was very wide (in the basement) so we'd just make like tunnels... she (Mom) worked in a factory. Packaging, so maybe that's where she got them from. We would line up boxes and they were tunnels and then my sisters would stand on the outside and go, 'Okay, it's your turn to go to the sun.' And then we go on the outside and shake it or poke holes in it and shine a light through it. We had to be resourceful.

In this location, the earliest of Sara's play memories took place; their first home together. Sara and her two sisters made an imaginary world for themselves out of the toys they had and the materials that they could find. Sara shared the excitement the girls experienced down in that basement, creating adventures for one another out of the things they found. This creativity continued in other areas of their play as well.

When the family eventually moved to a different neighborhood, their house had an entire floor just for the kids. The attic was a space the size of the footprint of the house, with enough room for serious play; all their toys, a television and an art and craft table for making things. It was up in this space that Sara remembers a large amount of Barbie play taking place. The girls would spend copious amounts of time setting up the dream house furniture to get it just right before they could start playing out certain pre-determined storylines with the dolls. Barbie went through a lot in that attic: cleaning the Dream House with q-tips, dressing up in dresses and heels for parties, boyfriends and the perpetual dramatic breakups and wild adventures where invariably Barbie would be

hanging from a cliff about to drop to her doom. Ultimately, Barbie would get married, and the girls would prepare for the ceremony by creating wedding gowns out of toilet paper and tissue:

Like toilet paper, or tissue paper. Put it on their heads and have, you know a long veil. We wrapped them up because it was white, and we didn't really have white dresses. So, we would just wrap them up and make their veils. It would be long, you know like a little runner and stuff like that. I don't know where we got that from.

The Barbies would become brides with elaborate wedding gowns, outfitted for their big day. Barring any unforeseen drama. Which there usually was.

Up in their Mother's room, the girls would create costumes out of the contents of her dresser. Ripping the sheets off of the bed, long gowns were created for princesses, adorned with old pieces of their Mother's lingerie. Getting ready for the ball was often interrupted by some drama. "We'd always pretend to be princesses, and I was always the witch, or like the evil stepmother, and we'd be like, 'Lock them up in the tower.' Or, 'You can only escape, if you solve these riddles.' Or like go on an adventure, get something and retrieve it, and then bring it back". Sara remembered this type of dramatic play as "actually really fun" and that she and her sisters found that the joy of this play was in the planning and the making, prior to the actual dramatization. The creativity involved in the stories she chose to share and her knack for extending play through her creations was apparent, and her ability to think creatively and playfully as an adult continues today.

The teacher at play. *Sara is up to her elbows in baking powder. She and two children are playing with the powder, which is meant simulate clown face paint, but has quickly turned into a sensory activity. Sara is repeatedly digging her hands into the tray of powder and letting it fall from her hands back into the tray. "It looks like it's snowing!"*

It's snowing in here!" I am surprised at how genuinely it seems Sara is enjoying this activity. Her face contorts in such a way that only a sensory experience can achieve. "Oh, you know what would be cool? We have a sifter!" Sara jumps up and grabs a sifter from the cabinet. She shows child how to use sifter, modeling the action and grinning. The kids are getting the baking powder all over the floor. She sees a child notice this and re-assures him, "We can vacuum later." Soon Sara has picked up the discarded sifter and continues to play. She makes it snow on her hands. "Oh, wow! That is so cool, look at that!" she exclaims, as she makes a mountain of baking powder on her hands. A child is standing on the periphery and she calls him over. "Come stand over here with me" and she rolls up his sleeves. "Grab some of this...feel it, did you try this?"

Right out of high school, Sara knew that she wanted to be a teacher. She was accepted into a teacher prep program at the State University near her home, and immediately began working with children in a work-study program. Throughout her four years as an undergraduate, Sara worked with a variety of young children with a spectrum of educational needs, leading her to finish with a dual major in Elementary Education and Special Education. Soon after graduating, Sara began working as a learning support specialist in a charter school in her home state, and spent her summers teaching in a migrant education program. She stayed in this position for two years, until she took a job as a dual-language teacher in a fifth-grade classroom at a different charter school in the area. It was in the four years spent here that Sara gained considerable experience teaching older children social studies and science in Spanish in the school's immersion program. Eventually moved to pursue other interests, Sara left teaching to pursue a Master's Degree in counseling and human services, with an interest in one on one community

counseling and family therapy. Upon completing her Master's degree, Sara began to look for work in a neighboring state, where she eventually she found herself back in the early childhood classroom as a head teacher in the afterschool program.

Throughout her schooling and her early teaching experiences, Sara thought of play as an important attribute to children's education, even if it was not at the forefront of her teacher education experience or the systems she taught in. Her pre-service training encouraged teachers to create activities and learning experiences that were fun and engaging, but not necessarily play-based. Sara remembered taking specific classes that focused on kinesthetic learning and how to make things simultaneously fun and educational, but mainly she remembered a considerable amount of content based teacher education. As Sara entered the work force, she soon discovered the ways in which she could incorporate play into her own instruction with older children, tossing a ball to students who raised their hands to answer a question, creating games around reading material out loud and making allowances for her students to engage with material in a playful way. "I always tried to make it-- for me, I thought I was just like trying to get them engaged. But looking back it was like a game and playing". Sara sought out areas in her early teaching life that made room for hands on activities, like leading the arts and crafts club, having her students create their own board games and encouraging her older students to use Powerpoint and Prezzie (presentation programs) as a means of presenting information that they had learned. It wasn't until Sara began working with young children and a play centered curriculum, when she discovered that play was so much more than simply making academic activities fun:

At first it took me a lot to adjust to it. I feel like I always believed that play was important and fun for learning and engagement, but I never realized until

(coming) here how important it was for building connections and relationships...I look back at my fifth-grade teaching years and I feel like I wasted a lot of time with curriculum and all of that. I feel like I look back now and it's just painful. Like, in a way, I didn't connect with them and I could have.

Sara is often making things with and for young children. On multiple occasions, I watched Sara provide her students with an activity from materials she has made from scratch, or crafting alongside children. During one particular week, the theme was the circus and Sara made a large circus tent from cut paper and placed it on the wall at child level. Next to the tent was glue and various bins of materials to place in the tent: Puffballs, ribbons and foam peanuts were ready to be placed among the animal stickers provided. Over and over again, children were drawn to the area, drenching the tent with glue and adding texture to the picture they were creating together. As each of them came to work on the art project, Sara sat right there with them narrating their choices and adding some items of her own. From an outsider perspective, she seems to genuinely be enjoying herself, creating something new with the children.

Discussing a history with play with these four women was remarkable. The teachers would get lost in the telling: some closing their eyes to evoke a feeling, some laughing about the ridiculousness of certain play scenarios, some lamenting about the play of their youth. Singularly, and as a group, the teachers (prompted by the interview process) shared a history with play that began with rich meaningful childhood memories and ended with experiences playing with the children in their classrooms.

Each individual shared a narrative encompassing “the child at play” and “the teacher at play,” illuminating various trajectories with and around play. The connections to and ideas about their childhoods were a driving force in discussing how they regard the

practice of play, and how these considerations are seen and were witnessed in the classroom. Kara's thoughtful facilitations, Megan's quiet meticulous work, Sara's creations, and Jane's unbridled joy for play; all of these women possess a very particular set of play skills that make them a valuable asset to the many play scenarios that young children find themselves in on a daily basis in school. While each of these play histories could stand on their own as a valuable look at four individual's experiences with play, looking across cases at the shared commonalities among them deepen understanding.

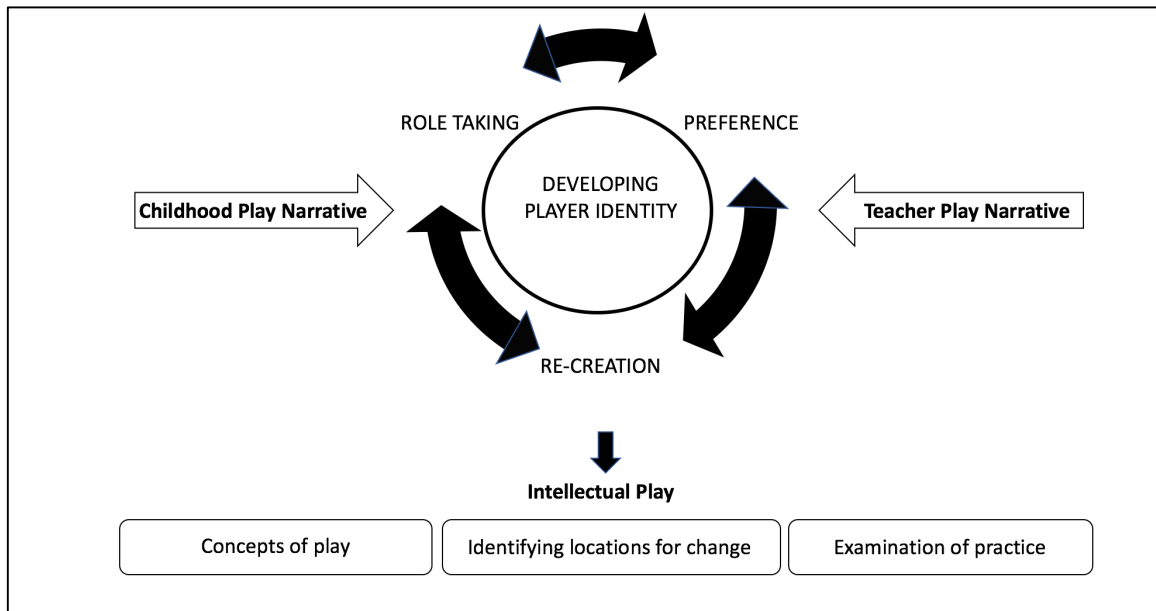
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The previous chapter examined four childhood histories. Each of these women's histories were "re-storied" chronologically, with the intent of exposing each individual's play trajectory: from childhood play, to adult play, to professional play. These individual stories illuminate four different lived experiences particular to their lives and thus four very different experiences with and perspectives on play; they stand alone as valuable information about the varied, complex lives of teachers.

After the chronological analysis of the individual play histories took place, the data was re-examined to identify the areas in which these women's experiences overlapped. This emergent process resulted in the identification of codes related to the commonalities among the four narratives—themes that emerged through my listening to stories of childhood and the process of re-storying. Ultimately, what was most striking, was not the overlap of experiences (which there were), but rather, the commonalities around the practice-based examination that took place by participating in the storytelling process, i.e., the overlap in how these women made use of this particular reflective practice.

In this chapter, I introduce a model that illustrates the process through which the teachers experienced the reflective practice of narrative creation. (See Figure 1). This model is a representation of the common themes and experiences that emerged within the narrative building process as shown in Chapter Four, but more significantly this model represents the processes and modalities by which the teachers used their own identity-building as a catalyst for critically understanding their own practice.

Figure 1--Personal-practical knowledge development



This model is meant to be read from top to bottom. The participant's teacher play narrative and the childhood play narrative feed into the circular system at the center of the model where player identity development occurs. This identity development is informed in three ways, as illustrated by the double-sided arrows around the central circle. Preference, re-creation and role taking are non-mutually exclusive categories, that describe the ways in which the participants experienced this identity development and are placed in no particular order. Following the arrow pointing down, the next portion of the model addresses what resulted from the participant's identity development, which was intellectual play. Here, the participants interacted with play concepts and play facilitation in three ways: concepts of play, examination of practice and identifying locations for change. In the following chapter, each piece of the model will be sharpened using the words and experiences of the participants to elucidate all of its parts. Additionally, within this chapter are the relationships between each component of the model, and the ways in which the participants moved through the model.

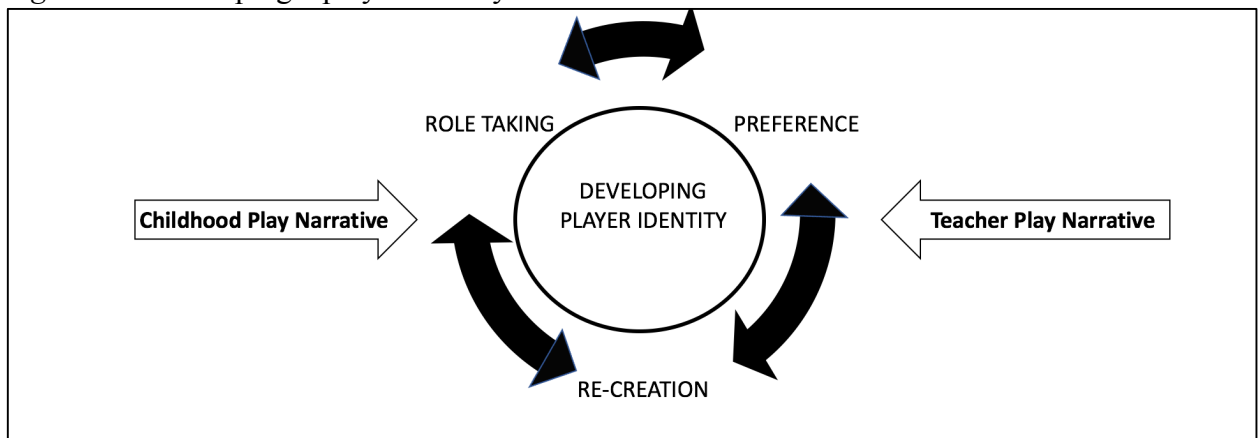
The first part of this chapter examines the circular system in the center of the model. This fluid image represents the active personal and professional identity-shaping that occurred via each individual's storytelling, as well as the various ways in which these four individuals expressed their memories and processed the act of play narrative development. Here, the process based commonalities among the participants are explored further—the ways in which each teacher experienced the reflective act of narrative building.

The second part of this chapter addresses the lower portion of the model. This section of the chapter explores how the teachers talked about their theoretical understandings of play and examined their role as an educator and a player within the context of the reflective process. Intellectual play is introduced here, as a way of representing the common modalities for examining practice through the lens of personal narrative. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will argue that a teacher's intellectual play, when framed within their own experience, becomes a crucial piece in the continuing development of personal professional knowledge and an individualized play pedagogy. In using narrative building as a springboard for conversations about practice, the teachers strengthened and continued to deepen an ownership of their history as a critical piece of their pedagogical toolkit.

Part One— Developing a Player Identity

- How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom?
- How do teachers interpret play both personally and professionally?

Figure 2—Developing a player identity



As portrayed in Chapter Four and reflected in the upper part of the model (Figure 2), the participants of this study all experienced a shaping of a player identity (white circle in the center) that was informed by the development of their child play narrative and their teacher play narrative (white arrows to the left and right). Whether identity is considered to be a self-identified “‘kind of person’ within a particular context” (Gee, 2001, p 99), or a lens through which teachers justify and process their “teacher self” in relation to their work and the larger world (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; MacLure, 1993; Sachs, 2005), the concept of teacher identity is considered to be a framework through which teachers develop their ideas on “how to be” “how to act” and “how to understand” their work and their place in society (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). In the telling of their stories and all the reflection and evaluation that goes along with it, each of the participants of this study began to define who they are within the context of a lifetime of experiencing and facilitating play.

In examining this identity shaping process more deeply, commonalities among the participants began to emerge that were based specifically in the experience of participating in this particular reflective practice—i.e., common attributes in

experiencing this particular type of narrative building. To understand these commonalities more deeply, the teacher narratives, which were originally organized chronologically, were reorganized from the raw data with broad codes to represent periods of play described by the participants: child play, adult play and teacher play. Next, more specific codes were developed to understand the common experiences in the processing of a history with play. These codes (preference, re-creation and role taking) were thematic in nature and in direct relation to the *experience* of sharing a play narrative and developing a player identity (See Table 3).

Table 3 <i>Process-Based Thematic Codes</i>	
Preference	Narrative that suggests choice of or value placement on a particular type of play or play material as both child, adult and teacher. Narrative that suggests interest, appreciation and stimulation, or lack there-of.
Re-creation	Narrative that suggests feelings of pleasure, gratification and satisfaction as it pertains to reliving a childhood play experience within the context of the classroom, or sharing similar experiences with children.
Role taking	Narrative that suggests a possession of an identity as a particular type of player or play facilitator. Narrative that suggests establishment of an identifiable role taking within the context of the play as a child or an adult.

These thematic codes are a representation of the ways in which the participants revealed/discovered a player identity via narrative creation. Though not mutually exclusive, the model demonstrates (via the black arrows surrounding the circle in Figure 2), how each of the participants at one point or another expressed preference, or shared instances of re-creation and role taking throughout their stories of childhood play, as well as throughout their teacher play narrative. The process of sharing these memories and

musings on teacher play resulted in each of the participants claiming a stance on who they were as players and who they have become as practitioners of play.

Preference: Who am I as a player? The participants narrative often involved the taking of an evaluative stance on a particular kind of play and establishing a preference of certain types of play over others. For the purposes of coding, preference was defined as narrative that suggests choice of or value placement on a particular type of play or play material as both child and adult, or narrative that suggests interest, appreciation and stimulation, or lack there-of. For organizational purposes this section is divided into preferences stated in the childhood play narrative, and preferences stated in the adult play narrative and in the teacher play narrative. In this section, I highlight the moments in which the participants revealed themselves as individuals with active interests in specific play activities both as children and adults. In their rich descriptions of play that held and continues to hold their interest, the participants began to merge the past and the present and build an identity as a person who plays (See Figure 2).

Childhood play narrative. Every participant I spoke with about their memories of play had similar reactions. No matter the background, no matter the context, when I spoke with the participants about their childhood play something lit up inside them. Each interview began with a prompt asking the participants to walk me through their childhood home. As all of the teachers took me on this journey, smiles and laughter were present throughout the sharing of the special locations for their play-spots that only a child knows-- a branch of a tree, a basement, a barn, a cozy arm chair. In describing these spaces for play the teachers conjured memories of times long forgotten and the feelings that went along with them.

All of the participants were very clear about what it was they liked to play as children. In the telling of their memories, each of the participants exposed certain areas of their play world that they were drawn to: active play, doll-based dramatic play, quiet play etc. These preferences were manifested simply, in the telling of what they did as kids, and re-enforced via expression of enjoyment and pleasure. Each of the participants carved out a play story for themselves that only they could share-- the details chosen to illuminate the experiences that were most meaningful. Sarah relished the description of the dollhouse she shared with her sister and the particularities of the play that made it so special. "We loved our dollhouse. It was pretty big. It was plastic... The living room had all these little pieces, and the dining room had all these pieces, and you had to buy them separate and then you could put them together. I loved setting up everything." By identifying what it was she loved about her dollhouse she evoked her own enjoyment of that play, which came across in her storytelling. Her face brightened, she used her hands more to accentuate her descriptions. The development of this narrative brought about a defining of the ways in which each individual liked to play and a sense of joy in the telling; the unique circumstances that made a particular type of play special to them.

The participants utilized memory and nostalgia in the shaping of themselves as a player by describing what they liked to play, and the reasons why they liked playing in that way. Megan's smile grew as she began to remember a toy that she loved: "Easy Bake Oven! It was so fun, because you cooked with a light bulb, you know it's just weird and it was just teeny tiny little portions of fun things to eat, I'm sure it was absolutely awful, but it was so fun." The telling of these moments, and the identification of such play materials

connected the participants to the play of their past and, perhaps more importantly, the value that went along with particular types of play.

As the participants shared the types of play and play materials they preferred to engage with and why they preferred it, they all pondered the attributes of the play that engaged them. Kara talked about the outdoor play of her youth: “Well, my generation—we go out and play. With two big brothers and a little sister, you had your playmates right there. So that was nice. If it was cold, we would hike back in the woods, and we’d go skating on the ponds, and thought nothing of it.” While Kara identified an activity she preferred, her clarification regarding what it was she loved about that play was accompanied by a larger defining statement about the way she played as a child. Her commentary exposes joyful pride in the way she played, and the assumption that children don’t play that way any longer.

Conversely, the participants were also able to identify the play activities they didn’t care for. What they didn’t like to play and why was typically connected to sibling conflict/relationships, (the roughhousing of Kara’s brothers, the bossy dramatic vision of Sarah’s sisters etc.), but interestingly, the conversation often shifted to broader statements about particular types of play or even shifting the preference to the present tense. Megan shared her anxiety around the outdoor game capture the flag and other competitive sports like dodgeball: “I really don’t like competitive stuff and I don’t like stuff that hurts, who wants to have a ball thrown at them? I don’t find it fun, at all”. This taking of a negative stance on a particular type of play, supported by statements about what they did like to play as children were shapers of a player identity—someone who has a history of preferring certain types of play over another.

The recalled childhood play-memories of the participants both positive and negative led to an establishment of the self as a particular type of player within the context of childhood. When the participants talked about their childhood play, they took it upon themselves to self-name as a particular “type” of player; some even making identity shaping statements like “I was a Barbie girl” or “I was very tomboy”. In the storytelling and shaping of their childhoods, the participants reflected an image of themselves as a player with preferences within their particular contexts.

This narrative, due to its focus on the past, involved a particular type of recall—one that involves the evocation of not only memory, but the feelings and emotions tied into those memories. The identity of the player, shaped by the participants and myself, was solidified in the collaborative titling of each of their sections of chapter four: Megan, The Puzzler, Jane, The Character, Kara, The Explorer and Sarah, The Maker. In providing the rich details of what play activities they chose to participate in as children, they were carving a space to express the type of player they thought they were, and ultimately, this defining continued as a self-expression of the player identity they currently inhabit. Not unlike the processes mentioned above, the teachers continued to use preference as a means of self-identification, but within the context of their classroom, and their play preferences as adults.

Adult Play Narrative. In sharing a lifespan history with play, the narrative often shifted to the ways in which these individuals played as adults. Far different from the play of their childhood or the play that occurred in the classroom, all of the participants shared the playful ways in which they currently chose to spend their free time. Many of the participants re-enforced their enthusiasm for childhood preferences by providing

examples of how they continue to play in this manner today. In describing the details about what it is she loved about crafting, Sara, The Maker, talked about making event centerpieces by placing lights, beads and flowers in glass jars, crystal vases or spray-painted cigar boxes and flower arrangements. She talked extensively about the work that goes into planning these center pieces and the enjoyment she gets out of that process:

I guess the aesthetics of it. I like planning and thinking, and piecing together: ‘Oh, this color looks good with this color with this scheme’, or ‘this material I think will look good with this material.’ I start with the materials first and the color, then I think about the arrangement, the design and then the structure, it’s very relaxing to me.

Some of the teachers identified areas in which their childhood play has spilled over into how they choose to play as adults. Jane, The Character, laughed about how she had just recently gone to the Disney store and bought princess themed Barbies, simply because she couldn’t help herself and Megan, The Puzzler, shared that she still likes to play word games and scrabble with her family, much like she did with her grandparents as a child. In talking about their current play interests in conjunction with their discussion of childhood preferences, the participants further aligned themselves as individuals who prefer to play in particular ways. Kara, The Explorer, related her childhood nature excursions, to her current wanderlust. In talking about her summers up at the lake, she described how she continues to explore today. “I’ll go on canoe trips too, sometimes, by myself, where you port the canoe, and then you stop at another island, and you sit and have lunch and read. What’s better than that? Then you go for the swim. Oh, it’s mental health. It’s hard to come back here...”

The development of a player identity, when considered as something that occurs over the course of a lifetime, includes the play of adults. In describing the attributes of

their adult play, either as a continuance of their preferred childhood play activities, or as a re-enforcement of a love of a particular kind of play, the participants shifted their preferences from something they *used* to love playing, to something they *continue* to love playing. This merged the past and the present, creating further depth to the question, “Who am I as a player?”, and created a foundation from which to examine their teacher play in a more well-rounded way.

Teacher Play Narrative. As the narrative shifted toward the role of these teachers within the play lives of their students, I asked them to describe what they preferred to play with in their classroom. This posed a challenge—teachers aren’t typically asked what they truly enjoy doing over the course of their day, separate from the needs and interests of their children. Initially, many of the participants had a hard time considering what they truly enjoyed doing, rather than discussing what the children in their classroom enjoyed. I pushed them to think specifically about activities and materials that excited them fully—calling on what they had shared about adult play as shown above: Kara’s hiking, Sarah’s crafting etc. Drawing from the essence of that adult play, I asked them to tap into where in their daily working lives they have moments of total involvement. That clarification allowed the teachers to think about and identify the ways in which they engage with play while in the classroom for purely personal reasons, and how these adult interests have connections to their childhood play.

Similar to the establishment of preference in their childhood play narrative, the participants were able to define and emphasize the classroom play scenarios in which they were truly engaged in the act of play. Some were very explicit about what materials and activities they identified with the most. Much like the quiet play of her youth, Megan

shared an interest in building. She often talked about being drawn to tables where children are working with structures: “I go into the building areas and the marble chutes...So, for me, I guess it’s an interest in physics. I love building with them. I love playing marbles with them. Those are the things I enjoy. And sorting and playing with manipulatives. That’s my thing”. These types of declarative statements regarding what it is they genuinely appreciate about playing along-side children were common across all the cases. Jane also used similar self-defining language as it pertains to play in the classroom, sharing, “I am a pretender. I do that always...I think this is coming from me being an only child for most of my life, because I am a pretender. I mean, I *like* to do that.” Here Jane not only claims to be a particular type of player, she draws a line between her play life as a child and her play life as an adult, further defining her player identity in a more complete way.

The teachers also shared areas of early childhood play that they don’t care for as practitioners. All of the teachers were quick to address that while they knew the benefits of this particular type of play for children and willingly engaged with the children at play when needed, it was something that they did not prefer to take part in. Megan recalled the play of her childhood as she discussed her general distaste for dramatic play:

I absolutely hate it. I don't like pretending. I remember playing with my sister she would say, ‘You say this and then I say this and then I'll say this.’ So, she was the director of this imaginative play. I would do it because it was just she and I, but as an adult, I do not like dramatic play. I never engaged in it with my own children. They have their own thing. They play lions and all sorts of games, but I never, ever got involved in it. And I cannot stand it.

Megan's vibrant description of her experience with dramatic play contained reference to her childhood experiences as an example of the origins of her feelings about dramatic play, as well as how these feelings manifested themselves in her adult life.

Sarah, too, shared a dislike of dramatic play. While describing a play scenario with one student she shared, "All he wanted to do was just go, 'Oh, help me, help me.' we were playing dollhouses and he just wanted to constantly go onto the top of the top of the house and go, 'Help me, help me, help me.' There was no dialogue. I couldn't get anything going." By providing the details regarding what it is she disliked about this dramatic play (in this case the repetitive nature of this play scenario), Sara further informed her growing definition of who she is as a player. Although she shared a love of setting up the furniture in her dollhouse as a child, when it came to the dramatics of playing with a dollhouse with a child she was not interested. "I did like to play in my dollhouse, which was my favorite-est thing when I was younger, [but] I really did not enjoy playing [with] the dollhouse with him." In stating what she didn't like about certain types of play, and placing it in contrast to the preferences of her childhood, she added more depth to her developing player identity.

Kara shared a perspective on the play of her students that was in contrast with her childhood preference of outdoor play. In sharing her resistance to the superhero play in her classroom and the role of media in children's play lives, she stated: "We're bombarded with media. So much of it takes place the rest of the day, and I don't want to hear about some superhero 24/7." Kara's opinions about classroom media play are meaningful, particularly when held in conjunction with her descriptions of childhood

outdoor play. Her differentiation between her play and the play of some of her students, reflects a conscious personal evaluation and order of the two types of play.

These honest reflections about the unenjoyable aspects of playing with young children are a crucial piece in the formation of the preferences established in this narrative. Statements like those mentioned above highlight the possibility that each of these individuals come into the classroom (as adult players, but also as practitioners who play) with a particular set of interests and preferences that inform their engagement in children's play.

In the telling of their history with play and the subsequent reflection on classroom play, each of the teachers exposed preferences and opinions about the types of play that they engaged in as children and later as adults. These evaluations lived within the rich descriptions of various play scenarios and play materials, as well as the strong assertions ("I loved" or "I hated") in regards to the types of play they experienced. The teachers shared similar evaluations as they took stock of what they enjoyed playing within the context of the classroom. In the sharing of what it is they liked to spend their time doing as children and what they are drawn to in the classroom as adults, the participants began to give shape to two questions, "Who was I as a player?" and "Who am I as a player now?" In the investigation of these two questions, we discovered that the past and the present were not mutually exclusive and the merging of childhood play preferences and teacher play preferences were not uncommon. Some participants made explicit connections between their childhood play and their teacher play, like Jane's statement about being an only child and her proclivity to pretend, or Megan's hatred of dramatic play throughout her lifetime. Others shared connections that were more covert and

dichotomous in nature like Kara's value placement on outdoor play and her reluctance to involve herself in the popular media in the play of her students, or Sara's love of setting up a dollhouse but her frustrations with the repetitive play of her student. Regardless, the preferences stated in the child play narrative and those mentioned in teacher play narrative represent a location in which the past informs the present, resulting in a more comprehensive self-defined player identity.

The development of these player identities, (and all the reflection, pride and evaluation it requires), helped to re-enforce a system of beliefs about play and its importance in the daily curriculum of young children. In addressing the questions, "Who was I as a player?" and "Who am I as a player now?" the teachers' attention naturally shifted to their play work, and the role of these self-defined preferences in their teaching. After sharing their proclivities for play, and further defining who they were as players, the teachers began to discover areas in which their interests and preferences merged with their teaching.

Re-creation: Who am I as a player within the context of the classroom? The preferences of the participants, as discussed above, represented a lifetime history with play and the current interests in particular types of classroom play that accompanied that history. The sharing of these preferred methods of play, both past and present, informed the continuing development of a player identity. As the narrative shifted from the past to the present, it also turned the narrative gaze from inward to outward-- from the play preferences of the individual, to the play interests of the children in their classrooms. This portion of the chapter explores the theme of re-creation; the teachers' descriptions of participating in what they consider enjoyable play alongside their students, and re-

creating play experiences for young children that match their own history and interests. Re-creation was defined for coding purposes as narrative that suggests feelings of pleasure, gratification and satisfaction as it pertains to reliving a childhood play experience within the context of the classroom, or sharing similar experiences with children. As shown in Figure 2, in talking about their play interests within the context of the play interests and needs of their students, the teachers revealed an area of consonance in which the two live simultaneously and become a larger part of a player identity—an individual who plays and provides for play.

The teachers all shared areas of classroom play that they enjoy experiencing alongside their students as well as individually. While still seemingly connected to their personal preferences of certain types of play, the teacher play narrative of the participants shifted toward an examination of children's engagement rather than simply identifying what they enjoyed doing. When sharing the positive experiences of playing alongside the students in their classrooms, the teachers exposed a level of satisfaction and pleasure in knowing that the children are experiencing a particular type of play. Kara shared, "Well, for me there's nothing more exciting than taking a walk in the woods, seeing and hearing the birds and the animals. That's part of the reason I like being here, too; because it's their eyes and their enjoyment of nature all again". The voicing of this unique connection between the play interests of the teachers and the engagement of their students, marks an important location in which the merging of the personal and the professional takes place.

In exploring what play they genuinely enjoy working with and modeling alongside the children in their classroom, some teachers went so far as to reveal an impulse to recreate the play experiences of their youth. Jane shared, "I like them to be

excited about different things, I remember how I played as a kid and what I liked to do and I try to just bring that back as much as possible.” The power of memory and nostalgia is powerful here, wherein Jane unequivocally states that she wants to “bring back” the play of her youth through the eyes of her students. Megan shared a similar sentiment:

My physical play that was outside always had something to do with nature and animals and really that’s what I do with my kids here at school. I bring in worms for them to play with, one of the students brought in a snake for them to see, we go on walks and we follow the wood chucks, I mean, I love the science-y aspect of teaching children.

Utilizing her own history, Megan made explicit connections between her proclivities for certain types of play, and her pedagogical actions that mirror her childhood experiences.

This common point in every individual’s story, is where a bridge continues to form between narrative that expressed who these women are as players and narrative that expressed who they are as teachers who play. This turning point, shifted the focus from inward to outward, and created space for a re-defining of a player identity that encompassed both the personal and the professional.

Role-taking: Who am I as a player within the context of play facilitation? As the teachers spoke about play personally (Preference) as well as professionally (Re-creation), they continued to give shape to a developing player identity (See Figure 2). In talking about their own practice as teachers who play, the narrative also involved how they see themselves as facilitators of play. This chapter examines how the teachers talked about what they considered to be their job in relation to the play of their students. For the purposes of coding role taking was defined as narrative that suggests a possession of an identity as a particular type of player or play facilitator, or narrative that suggests establishment of an identifiable role taking within the context of the play as a child or an

adult. They did this in two ways: some directly related their role in the classroom to their personality and their developing player identity, while others took a more pedagogical approach to their definition of role within the play of their students.

In summarizing who they are within the context of their teaching, Jane and Sarah framed their roles as facilitators as a personality trait. In other words, they associated their facilitations with who they are inherently as an individual. Jane shared, "I'm a silly person. I'm a funny, silly person...And I really enjoy it, you know? I really do. I like getting silly. I like being funny with these guys and everything and go home when the day is done, but we all had a good day and it was really fun." Separate from any pedagogical strategy for facilitating play in her classroom, Jane shared her personal attributes that enhanced the play of her students. In taking up a facilitative role/playful identity in classroom play, Jane acknowledged her inherent value as a player within the context of the classroom. Sarah too, shared a more personal relationship with her role in the classroom, sharing, "I feel like my role is to protect playtime. I want to make sure that they play, because, I don't know, it just goes by so fast. Even though you can grow up and play, but it's different." Though generalized, the roles defined by these practitioners represent an impactful set of skills in the classroom. Identifying their distinguished roles as facilitators of play, further developed their player identity: as someone who is an important piece in the play lives of their students.

The role of pedagogy was present for Kara and Megan as they began to identify their role within the context of facilitation. Kara shared, "My role is to help them communicate and work together, and allow others in, and be a friend, share the kindness... Well, I like to be the observer; to stop, look, and listen." The roles and

attributes stated by the Kara represent a defining of a particular area of professional engagement—aligned with the traditional framework interpreted by Jones & Reynolds (2011). Similar to the roles defined in “The Plays the Thing” (Jones & Reynolds, 2011), e.g., player, teller, mediator, scribe, communicator, stage manager, and planner, Kara illustrates the variety of hats she wears while engaging in children’s play. Similarly, Megan shared “...my role, it varies depending on the day, depending on the child and the setting, but yeah, I am sometimes the facilitator, sometimes the parallel player”. Here Megan also shared the various roles she takes up, but she also expresses her skill in reading any given play scenario to determine how she chooses to engage with their play. The characterization of these roles is representative of a different type of skill set; one that is strongly connected to a placing of the self within the context of pedagogical thought rather than an inherent personality trait.

The teachers’ examinations of play facilitation were not always explicitly connected to the traditional actions of the teacher as outlined in the literature review (in the play or out of the play), but rather, the examination was a self-identification of skill and agility with play. Personal, or professional, the characterization of these roles were declarations of ownership over a particular set of skills and attributes as a player *and* a teacher.

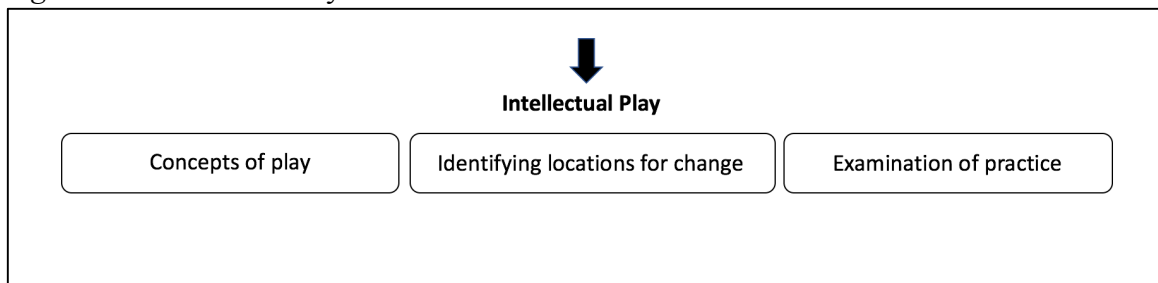
With their play stories as a basis for conversations around play, teaching and education, three themes emerged: preference, re-creation and role taking. As the model demonstrates, (Figure 2), these themes represent the participants common sources of engagement within a reflective process that examined the identities of four individuals. In talking about play through the lens of first childhood and later practice, the teachers

moved from passive feelings based expressions of memory, toward the actionable consequences of these evocative feelings. The merging of the past and the present was a large part of every participants journey with the narrative building process. This process-- the exploration of a lifetime with play and the clarification of who one is as a player and who one is as a practitioner of play were so powerful-- particularly when held in conjunction with one another as a lens for examining practice.

Part Two--Intellectual Play

- How do teachers facilitate for play?
- How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play?

Figure 3- Intellectual Play



While discussing a professional identity, the teachers also began to talk about play in a larger, more reflective sense. This included sharing thoughts and speculations about theoretical understandings of play as well as looking more deeply at their own practice. The participants all at one point or another began to intellectually play with their pedagogy—both in a theoretical and a practical sense. Based on an a priori coding scheme, the practice based data was organized by the type of reflection taken up by the participants. *Reflection on action* (Dewey, 1964; Schön, 1983), were the thoughts and musings that teachers shared about their practice and the ways in which they currently engage in classroom play. *Reflection in action* (Schön, 1983) came out of the thoughts

about practice in which teachers shared examples of the moments in which they made particular facilitative choices based on the play needs of their students in that particular moment. These codes were insufficient organization formats for understanding the nuanced ways in which teachers talked about practice through the lens of their own experiences. Emergent codes were then created to further understand the practice-based data within the context of this particular reflective process. When teachers began to discuss their own practice, they talked about play in three ways: concepts of play, examination of play practice and identifying locations for change (See Table 4).

Table 4 <i>Practice-Based Thematic Codes</i>	
Concepts of play	Narrative that suggests a definition or theorization of play that encompassed nostalgic discourse, play characteristic discourse, or developmental discourse.
Examination of play practice	Narrative that suggests acknowledgement of current practice and reflection on the modalities by which teachers engage in the play of their students.
Identifying locations for change	Narrative that suggests reflection upon the narrative creation process, and an impulse to change their current play practice.

Concepts of play. In discussing their professional identity, the teachers talked about play in a larger theoretical sense-- play with a capital P. The participants all shared different versions of what they think play means. This comes as no surprise, as a definition of play is infamously difficult to pin down, with myriad representations of play in the multi-disciplinary literature around play (Bergen, 2014). The participants were asked “What is play?” throughout the research process, and their responses were as

varied as their experiences. In Jo Ailwood's (2003) article titled "Governing Childhood Education through Play", she considers three discourses of play found in the early childhood literature: 1) A romantic/nostalgic discourse, 2) a play characteristic discourse and 3) a developmental discourse (Ailwood, 2003. p.228). These three areas provide a location for an understanding of the ways in which play is theoretically positioned in the field and interestingly, they also provide a framework in which the theoretical musings of the participants took place.

Romantic/nostalgic discourse. This type of discourse typically occurs through the telling of story or anecdotally (Ailwood, 2003). Within the shared narratives in chapter four, conceptualizations around play were framed within the personal experiences of the individuals. When talking about definitions of play in the larger sense, some of the participants theorized play through a personal lens. Sarah shared "When I think of play, I think of laughter. Where you're relaxed and not feeling like you're thinking about something else, you're enjoying what you're doing at that moment, and laughter comes to mind right away. So, if I'm laughing, then I'm playing around." In addition, some of the participants developed concepts of play in contrast to their own romantic recollections of play. As discussed in chapter four, Kara often spoke about how young children don't play the way she did as a child. "You had more empowerment, I think, too, to get out the good and the bad and the ugly. Now everything is so structured, and the whole term, the helicopter the play dates... I get nostalgic. Was it perfect? No. But would I like to start over again right now— no." In Kara's differentiation between her experiences and those of her students, she is conceptualizing and valuing play through the lens of her own childhood.

Play characteristic discourse. Discussing the attributes of play, much like defining it, is a complicated matter. Often, the characteristics and attributes of play are a large part of what makes up its meaning, (Eberle, 2014; Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn, & Almy, 1987), which was the case for some of the participants. Megan shared that play was “Feeling joyful, exploring. Sometimes it involves touching, listening, looking; sharing with someone else; being silly sometimes.” Different from the classifications of play found in the literature that attempt to codify and organize, the participants simply expressed the observed actions and emotions that inform their larger theoretical understanding of play. Sara shared a similar sentiment, expressing thoughts about the place of play in young children lives. “I feel like play is having fun, enjoying yourself, but then learning about yourself and learning about the people that you are playing with.” The simple descriptions of what play looks like in the lives of children, represents a particular understanding of play that is specific to the individual.

Developmental discourse. As discussed in chapter two, informed by the formative works of Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978), the role of play in children’s learning and development is a large part of how the field defines quality early childhood education (Coppie & Bredekemp, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). This dominant discourse of play was shared in various ways by the participants as well. Some of the participants shared perspectives and definitions of play that were broad in nature: Jane shared, “Play is the center of all learning.” Others were quick to make more detailed connections to the larger developmental impact of play. Sara stated, “I feel like through their playing they're exploring and then they learn about things, or it triggers things that they've heard in the classroom...and maybe through play they can bring it back into the classroom.” In

discussing play through the eyes of a practitioner, the teachers deepened their conceptualizations of play within the context of young children's learning and development.

Within the context of their own experiences, the teachers mused on the varied concepts of play and articulated their theoretical understanding of what play is, (an oft-contested area). These conceptualizations and definitions were defined by three types of play discourse as defined by Jo Ailwood (2003). What play means to children, its impact on human learning and development were all topics raised within the "teacher" narrative of this project. These conceptualizations of play seemed to be informed by their own experiences as children and as practitioners, establishing a strengthened ownership of an intellectual perspective on play.

Examination of play practice. When the participants walked me through the various roles and perspectives taken up in and around play, it exposed an opportunity for reflection just as Dewey intended. In taking ownership over their role as a play facilitator, the teachers took stock of their capabilities as a practitioner of play. This *reflection on action* (Dewey, 1963) manifested itself through the teachers' positive acknowledgements of current practice and the highlighting of the spaces and places in which this particular group of teachers chooses to enter the play of young children or not. Sarah shared:

I feel like if I were all letting them do it (play) on their own and me never engaging, I feel like that wouldn't be valuable. I do find more value in engaging with them and play, and I think that it's good. It's a good balance, because in the morning, yeah, I don't play with them outside. Then in the afternoon, I do it. I'm really in.

Here, Sarah describes play facilitation within the framework of her history and her

defined role in the classroom. Megan had a response based within a similar framework, but with an opposite perspective on play facilitation:

I realized when you were observing, that my style is not really to be "in there" with the kids, other than talking to them, and perhaps modeling the variety of ways to play with the materials... In my mind, play with children is very dialog based. Talking about what the child is doing, seeing, thinking...giving the child vocabulary, etc.

Accompanied by further conceptualizations of play, Megan acknowledged a particular style of play facilitation that she identifies with. In her statement above, she clarifies the alignment of her beliefs and her practice, locating herself in a very specific position within the play of her students. While Megan and Sarah identified distinctive ways to interact with children's play, Kara focused quite a bit on the fluidity of her role, and the necessity of moving in and out of children's play. "I love to be the next-door neighbor, jazz it up a little. Again, to be available, but not to be so immersed that I'm a play object – but sometimes that does happen in the beginning. Then I do like to take a step back and see if they can figure out." Kara highlights reading a particular play situation and moving in and out of the play to accommodate the needs of the children. She was careful to explain that her role as a facilitator of play changes every day, from one activity to another, from child to child. Jane shared that her involvement in the play of the students is more personal: "I feel like I have to, (be engaged) you know, in order to get through the day and enjoy myself and know that the kids are going to go home with something substantial, you know? How much are you paying for this school? Come on." Jane's interest in the play of the students in her classroom is heightened by her personal opinions about what and to whom her responsibilities are as an educator.

Each of the teachers, within the shaping of a teacher at play, were able to further

examine their own practice. Each individual shared a different perspective on the play needs of their students, and thus, a different angle on play facilitation. Facilitations from inside and outside the play of young children are highlighted here, much like the examples provided in the reviewed works from chapter two. These teacher/player identities vary from case to case, but are all a strong component in developing a sense of self within a play pedagogy—one derived in part from the storytelling that took place.

Identifying locations for change. Finally, teachers were quick to brainstorm together and individually, on ways in which they could improve upon the current play practices in their classrooms. When the narrative building practice was placed within the context of their experience as a participant in this study, all the teachers shared areas in which the reflective process of the research project made an impact. Some reflected on how the process of re-creating play scenarios of their childhood made them think about the impact of their history. Megan shared:

Now I see how I have definitely passed down similar ideas of play to my own children and to my young students. And how some of my mother's attitudes about play were handed down to me. Your project has definitely sparked some introspection in me, and it has been an eye-opening process for me.

Here, Megan clarifies the ways in which the act of recalling past experiences with play led to introspection on her part. Examining her own play in tandem with the examination of her play as a teacher, created a reflective space for Megan that introduced possibilities for pedagogical change. Later, she continued, “I definitely see and feel a deficit in that dramatic play area...So I think it’s definitely going to make me think about how I plan activities and try to include the dramatic play area better”. Her public examination and acknowledgement of herself as both a player and a teacher who plays (with all the

evaluation, history and memory it requires), strengthened an overall play ideology. Establishing this stance on play allowed space to wonder about the areas in which her practice could improve. Kara explicates this point: “Just by the very nature of doing this study with you, it made me think, how can I play more; how can I stimulate more; what can I be doing; what am I forgetting; what am I missing.” In viewing herself as an active participant in the play lives of children, Kara began to shift her gaze from a passive examination to an active one, geared toward pedagogical and facilitative change.

Sarah and Jane also shared the impact of their experience within the research project. For them, the reflective process illuminated areas in their teaching that were more personal. Sarah shared that, “Sometimes, like if I feel my mood is down, then I don't play as much with them. I feel like during this project it's made me so aware of that, like how a change in my mood is, like, ‘Oh, she's not as interactive as she usually is.’” She also shared how the project has pushed that critical examination into active change, stating, “I feel like the project has helped me be more present in the moment”. Jane too used the reflective process as a mode of introspection, coming to the realization that her proclivities for playing had an impact. She discovered that in her time in the classroom, “I really do things I want to do”, but when asked to look in an active way at her pedagogy she reflected that, “it can't be all about me all the time.” Through Jane's introspection, her capacity to recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of her play ideology was sharpened.

As discussed via the theoretical works of Dewey, Schön and Pinar in Chapter Two, the teachers' participation in the study places their lived experiences as a powerful tool in their deliberate, purposeful, reflective process that is ultimately aimed toward

change. Each of the teachers, when tasked with the work of building a play narrative from childhood to teacher-hood, ultimately landed on what they thought about play in a larger sense. Though teachers are often asked to opine about various aspects of learning and development, be it in professional development, staff meetings or with their peers, rarely is it held within the context of themselves as players. Through participating in this study, and the reflective process it required, each of the teachers found the opportunity to examine their play pedagogy through a different set of eyes. These were the eyes of someone who has a history with, preferences of, and value set about play that is all their own. When pedagogy is considered fluid, developmental and personal, this type of reflection becomes an opportunity for change. With their freshly defined player identity in the background, the teachers' theoretical understandings of play, identifications of facilitative roles, and the locations for change became more personal, meaningful investments in their pedagogical development.

In their descriptions of self as child and as teacher, all four participants held fast to a very particular identity of a person who plays. In talking about these particular areas of their play lives and the ownership that comes along with identifying their strengths as a player, the teachers transitioned easily into discussions about teaching practice as it relates to play. The *teacher at play* is developed in the narratives of Chapter Four. In talking about their practice, the teachers naturally took a stance on play and play facilitation, creating a space to inhabit as a practitioner. This self- reflection was a bit more challenging, as it required the teachers to still consider themselves as a player, rather than digging into their thoughts and actions around how children experience play. Each teacher used their play trajectory as a springboard for regarding themselves as an

adult player, evoking similar themes to that of their childhood play memories. These themes however, were the actionable counterparts to the “feeling-based” themes of their history.

Chapter four contained the detailed narrative of four teachers. These teachers, in sharing their personal memories of play, as children, as adults and ultimately as practitioners, defined and shaped the identity of a person who plays. Chapter five presented a deeper examination into the identity shaping that took place over the course of each participant’s storytelling process and the commonalities that occurred there. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this chapter exposed the importance of the reflective process itself, revealing that within the work of defining a holistic player identity that encompasses the child, the adult and the practitioner, a new, individualized pedagogical shape began to form.

A model was created to further describe commonalities found among the teachers’ narrative building and the shared identity shaping that took place within the reflective process. This model is meant to be read as fluid, shaped in part by the interview process, and in part by the narrative work of the individual. The model represents how through the development of a child play narrative and a teacher play narrative, a comprehensive player identity was formed--a clarified definition of “who am I as a player?” With this identity in tow, teachers began to examine their own practice through a new lens, examining larger theoretical understandings of play, as well as tackling a critical inventory of their own practice. This model displays a process of personal definition within the context of play that asks teachers: Who was I? → Who am I? → What do I believe? → What can I change?

This process provided valuable input toward a new-found ownership and sense of pride over each individual's personal-practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandini, 1988). This knowledge encompasses not only their play pedagogy, (the practical expression of their personal and professional ideas about play, (Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013, p. 4)), but also, it encompasses their past *experiences and identities* with play. A play history and a reflection on such, all became a part of the larger body of knowledge about play within the context of their teaching, and their individuality as a practitioner with a set of values around play. This knowledge and a sense of pride over your skills as a player become invaluable when approaching the play facilitations and choices that teachers are faced with in the current academic climate.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this narrative case study was to uncover and describe the ways in which four teachers' personal play histories informed their facilitation of, provision for, and perceptions of dramatic play in their classroom. This was framed by research questions that narrowed the focus of the work toward the perspectives of teachers:

- How do teachers understand the relationship between their personal play histories and their practices in the classroom?
- How do teachers interpret play both personally and professionally?
- How do teachers facilitate for play?
- How does participating in the reflective process continue to shape teachers' perceptions of play in their classrooms or their facilitation of play?

In the collecting of four individual play histories, a life span re-telling of memories and stories of play, I was able to understand and explore the impact of a life with play and the power of the storytelling process as a vehicle for deeper pedagogical meaning. This chapter contains a discussion of the findings of this study in relation to the relevant research, its implications for practice within the current academic context and finally, the limitations of the study that provide areas in which there are future opportunities for further research.

The work of this study is located within the context of the state of play in the early childhood classroom. The understanding of the importance of the role of play in young children's learning and development, (e.g., Elkind, 2008; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Gopnik 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009), alongside the acknowledgement that teachers are a key piece in quality early childhood education (e.g.,

Barnett, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011) creates space for work that looks to the relationship between teachers and play. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two presents a multitude of ways in which teachers can participate (or not) in the play of young children, (e.g., Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003; Hadley, 2002; Harper & McClusky, 2003; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003; Lindqvist, 2001; Logue & Detour, 2011) but the common thread among all of the various modalities for play engagement is the need for teachers to make intentional choices about the play of their students, no matter the method. The development of a play pedagogy informed by preparatory education and classroom experiences, as well as lived experiences was introduced as a part of the valuable toolkit that each teacher brings into the classroom every day. I argued that an individual's history, or lived experiences with play are a part of that play pedagogy toolkit and a modality for understanding and reflecting on practice.

This reflective practice, as outlined in the theoretical framework in Chapter Two, highlights using the lived experiences of the participants as the data for this study, and thus a narrative methodology was chosen. Four participants took part in qualitative interviews, focus groups, and focused observations, all geared toward collecting a play history narrative that spanned from childhood through adulthood. This play narrative has been examined (via both the process and the content) through a format of narrative analysis that involved a chronological "re-storying" of each individual story and the themed analysis across the four cases. These examined play histories have served as a modality for understanding the importance of personal history, a reflection of the power of reflective practice and a vehicle for teachers to find ownership in the identity of a

“person who plays.”

Discussion

This study examined the development of a play history narrative as a tool for self-reflection and pedagogical change. The narratives in Chapter Four, along with the model in Chapter Five, illustrate the processes by which each of the participants experienced this reflective practice. This portion of the chapter looks to discuss the findings of this study that place the reflective practice of play history building as a valuable tool in the further development of play pedagogy.

The work on reflective practice by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) framed this study, and helped to define the areas in which teachers are known to reflect on their practice. The work of Pinar brought autobiography to the fore as a modality for understanding practice. This study proposes an additional format for teacher reflection and self-assessment, in which the process of creating play history presents an opportunity for teacher reflection geared toward awareness and pedagogical change. This reflection is not *in action* or *on action* as Dewey and Schön suggest, but rather it is reflection *on past*; using narrative and identity building as a means of reflection. The findings of this study add to the body of research around reflective practice by considering play history in three ways: as an individual identity builder, as a pedagogical identity builder, and as a developer of personal practical knowledge.

Play History as an Individual Identity Builder

The construction of teacher identity was historically considered to be singular and static, (Day, Kington, Stobard & Sammons, 2006) whereas more recent research on the development of a teacher’s identity reveals that it is in fact dynamic. Considering identity

building as an active, ongoing process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) allows space for examining the personal identity building of the four participants within the framework of sharing a lifetime of play. In looking across the cases, the participants all experienced a reflective process; the sharing of a child play narrative and a teacher play narrative. The culmination of this process was a re-shaping of a player identity. This finding is supported by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) assertion that identity is something formed through teachers' self-narrative. This shaping was informed by three themes throughout all of the participant's narratives: a stating of preference of some types of play over others, found instances of re-creation in the classroom, and the taking up of play roles. Across the four cases, each of the participants experienced the narrative creation process in similar ways, sharing their traits and attributes around play and play facilitation that shaped their identity as a player.

As the narrative began, it was inward looking in nature, and focused on the traits of the individual. As the lifespan narrative shifted from childhood to adulthood, the gaze turned outward, and onto the roles that the individuals would take up within the context of the classroom. Individual identity and role are two domains that are not isolated from each other in this process, but rather, they are informed by one another and the context in which they reside. If identity is to be considered ongoing as Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggest, it is the interplay between identity and role/past and present that re-shapes a newer, more complete, yet evolving player identity. From Jane's self-identification as a pretender and her establishment of such a role in the classroom, to Kara's connection to the outdoors and her joy in discovering nature alongside her students, each individual shared two spheres of their play lives that are not causal, but

rather, key pieces to understanding the play self in an authentic way. The identity of the teacher-self and the roles taken up in the classroom inform and strengthen one another, creating an overarching player identity that encompasses a lifetime with play, both personally and professionally.

The work of this study and the concept of player identity adds to the literature regarding sources of influence on teachers' roles in the dramatic play of their students (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006); Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009). The congruency between teacher identity and teacher role, creates space for understanding the ways in which teachers may take up or put down various modalities for play in their classrooms, and acknowledges the reflective practice of developing play history narrative as an effective tool for self-examination and personal assessment.

Play History as a Pedagogical Identity Builder

When “play pedagogy” is considered to be the merging of personal knowledge, (who I am) and practice based knowledge, (what I do) (Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013, p. 4), it encompasses many different aspects of the daily experience of play in the early childhood classroom. Teachers' choices around the materials, time, and formats for play are key decisions to be made that are informed by a “pedagogical tool kit” that includes skills learned in teacher education programs, and personal experiences, memories and values (Ayers, 1989; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2013). The work of this study looks to the reflective practice of play history creation as an additional pedagogical tool.

The development of a player identity reframed the participant's perspectives on themselves as practitioners creating a platform for interpreting play academically. The

four teachers reflected on larger conceptual ideas about play, examined their practice through the lens of their developing identity, and identified locations for pedagogical change. This area of self-reflection, informed by the lived experiences in and around play, established play history and the narrative building process as a useful tool in a reflective process geared toward change. By examining their theoretical understanding of play and what they considered to be their skills as a practitioner of play, the teachers identified with and took prideful ownership of a key role within the play lives of their students. Additionally, by giving voice to the areas in which they playfully excel, areas in need of attention were brought to light. Each of the teachers located possibilities for change, by highlighting the roles that they tend to take up as a matter of habit, areas they tend to avoid in the classroom, and the play activities that could use more intentional facilitation. These areas of pedagogical introspection informed the individual's perceptions of their current capabilities as a teacher who plays, but also pushed the participants to think about ways in which they can improve the quality of their play interactions in the classroom.

This finding is a valuable addition to the literature around teacher-child interactions in classroom play (e.g., Gmitrova and Gmitrov, 2003; Hadley, 2002; Harper & McClusky, 2003; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kontos, 1999; Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2003; Lindqvist, 2001; Logue & Detour, 2011). As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, teachers can take up a range of roles in the dramatic play of their students. They can choose to enter the play or not depending on the context of the play scenario, but what is of the most import is the quality of those interactions. In examining their personal conceptualizations of play and current play practice through the

lens of their player identity, teachers can have a clearer understanding of why they do what they do, and take a comprehensive look at their pedagogical choices around play.

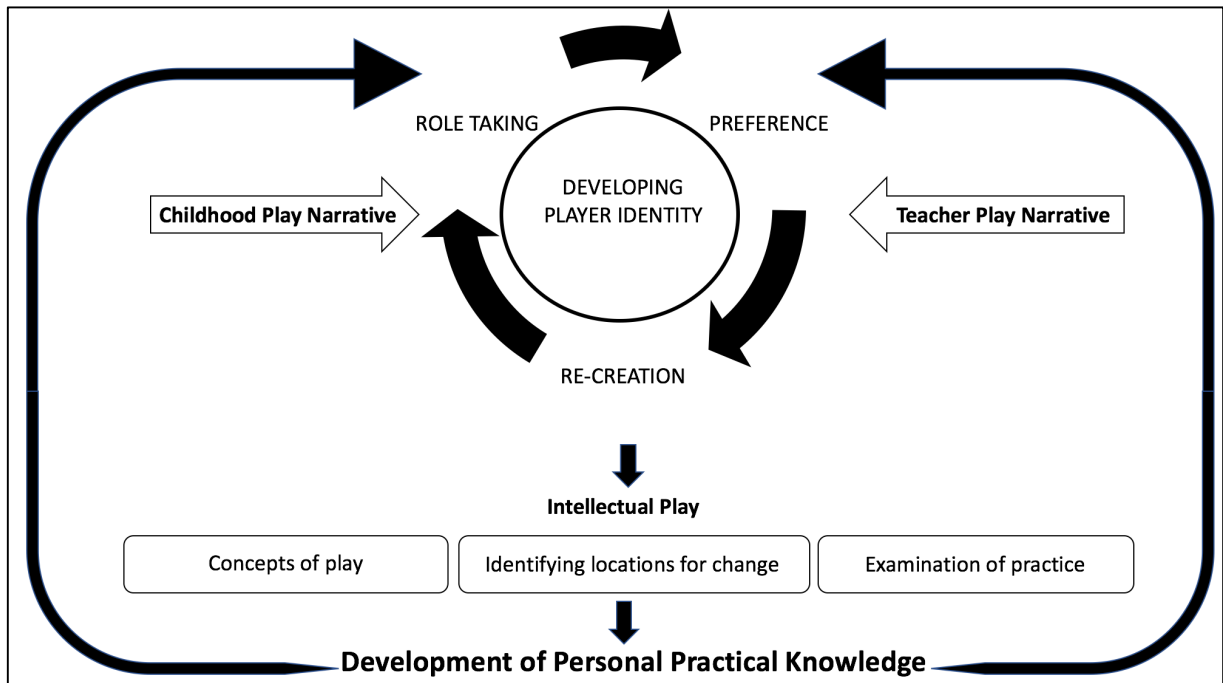
History as a Developer of Personal Practical Knowledge

The acknowledgement and ownership of what these individuals believed about play and how they saw themselves as practitioners, together with a self-defined player identity led them to think of their practice in a new way. Within this reflective process teachers carried their pasts into their present as a way to define themselves and their practice, but also as a means of identifying areas for change. The culmination of the creation of a play history was a deepening of each individual's personal practical knowledge. Personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) is a teacher's body of knowledge that is informed by their lived experiences.

Personal practical knowledge is in the teachers' past experience, in the teachers' present mind and body and in the future plans and actions...It is, for any teacher, a particular way of re-constructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, p. 25).

In merging their perceptions of who they were as players with who they have become as practitioners of play, each of the participants expanded their body of knowledge toward a new way of knowing and looking at practice. This new way of viewing the play in their classrooms and their role in it, strengthens a self-hood around play practice and further informs each individual's player identity. As shown in Figure 4, this newly enhanced personal professional knowledge, resulting from the reflective work of this study feeds back into the evolving player identity of the practitioner. This way of knowing supports and informs further ownership and development of the identity of a player-- in life and in practice.

Figure 4—Personal Practical Knowledge



It is important to expect and allow for teachers to look inward and account for the influences brought to bear by their own personal contexts. Every teacher that walks into a classroom carries with them a past: a player identity that has its foundation in their childhood play, and its extension in their play as an adult. If “human beings are shaped by and shapers of their context” (Freysinger, 2006, p.54), and play is a lifelong developmental process, teachers’ play histories cannot be overlooked as a significant factor in the pedagogical choices that are made within the early childhood classroom.

Implications for Practice

This study is framed within the current academic climate in which play has been diminishing in early childhood classrooms (Falk, 2012; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). Given that play and the teachers role in it are key components of what is considered to be quality early childhood education, understanding how teachers interpret play is of particular interest. This study situates teachers’

interpretations of play within the context of the reflective practice of autobiographical narrative creation, and thus exposes three implications for practice to be considered within the field at large.

The first of these implications, is a consequence of considering play history as an individual identity builder. According to Clandinin & Connelly, (2000), teacher identity is formed through teachers' narratives about themselves, which (when identity is considered fluid and dynamic), was evidenced in the common experiences across the four cases. The four teachers all experienced the reflective process as a means of understanding themselves in a new way—through their own experiences. In sharing their experiences with play in and out of the classroom, teachers can expose their strengths as players and as practitioners who play. This acknowledgement and ownership of play strengths, can re-frame identity, fostering a productive form of self-assessment. This could be especially valuable for teachers who have difficulty incorporating play into their classroom, in that the self-assessment that results from play history interviews elicits talk about their individual play strengths, and helps them locate types of play that they may find more palatable.

The second of these implications, is a consequence of considering play history as a pedagogical identity builder. This format of self-assessment can be put in conversation with professional assessments of the roles and responsibilities that teachers ideally take up in play, as discussed in Chapter Two. There, I concluded that it was not a matter of how teachers (in the play or out of the play) engage in the play of their students, but rather the quality of those interactions that held the most import. As a result of this format for self-assessment, teachers can recognize where the gaps exist in their practice, and

identify locations for pedagogical change. Megan, the puzzler, expressed a dislike of dramatic play both as a player and as a practitioner, and in the final steps of the research process made explicit connections and plans for change in pedagogical practice “I definitely see and feel a deficit in that dramatic play area...So I think it’s definitely going to make me think about how I plan activities and try to include the dramatic play area better.”

The third implication views the methodology of this project as an opportunity to push practitioners beyond what they consider to be the confines of classroom life. For teachers and for administrators, this format of reflection and self-assessment is powerful in two ways: it rejects the identity and role of the teacher as simply a vessel for curriculum implementation and exposes the human experience as a large piece in the shaping of a teacher identity, and when play is placed at the forefront of personal narrative, it no longer can be looked at as simply a frivolous activity, but rather a shaper of identity and the center of peoples’ lives. Sharing a history with play, the co-creation of a narrative, and the community building that occurs in a focus group allows space for teachers to be heard and validated, and to clarify their values around play.

Significance

Play history interviews result in thick self-assessment that combines two vectors: individual and professional. The significance of this study, is the use to which this self-assessment can be put. As a result of this type of self-assessment, teachers are armed with the personal professional knowledge and categories of information that they can use to inform their daily pedagogical choices. Through this reflective practice teachers can: identify the types of play they like and are comfortable facilitating in their classroom and

lean into that, identify things they dislike and find ways to approach those play situations with self-awareness and teachers can identify locations for expansion of their pedagogical repertoire, as shown in Megan's case where she acknowledged a deficit and expressed an intention to address that deficit through changes in her practice. All of these uses of self-assessment based on play history interviews provide teachers with opportunities to improve their play practice.

In addition, this study holds significance as it relates to the field of research in early childhood education. This study provides a counter narrative to the dominant discourse in early childhood research, and shifts perspective to the voices of teachers, an area lacking in the research in and around early childhood (Ryan & Goffin, 2008). In asking who early childhood teachers are, and what drives the decisions they make, attention is paid to the lives of those in the classroom, and elevates the voices of teachers.

In teacher education programs, course work designed around play-based curriculum would benefit from using this reflective practice. Pre-service teachers can use the collection of play history interviews and personal narrative building as a vehicle for understanding their own ideas about play as well as the ideas of their peers. Asking students to formulate and conduct play history interviews with one another provides an opportunity to examine play from another perspective, while deeply examining their own experiences with play. Taking a deep dive into the play narrative of their peers, listening or reading transcripts of themselves and re-storying their own play narrative provides an opportunity for students to re-examine play as not a just a frivolous activity for children, but a large piece of who they are, as humans and as future teachers. Additionally, by exploring who they wish to become as teachers through the analytical lens of who they

were, (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014) teacher education students have the opportunity to more deeply develop a sense of where their play skills reside, and its place is in the early childhood classroom.

In service teachers could benefit from the use of play history narrative in professional development settings, or as a personal assessment strategy for supervision purposes. Professional development is typically localized to classroom activity and occurs over the course of the day, whereas using this form of reflective process and self-assessment has the capacity to be relational in nature and ongoing. Possible professional development could involve play memory journaling, interviews and group discussions to engage in the process with peers. Asking teachers to participate in and collect play history interviews with one another creates space to engage with each other playfully and personally while examining practice in a more holistic way. If teachers engage in play history interviews as a form of professional development, the activity becomes personal, reflective and conversational, with multiple locations for access.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The strength of this study is that it was the first of its kind to examine play history as a format for reflective practice for in service teachers. The aim of this narrative case study was not to generalize, but rather to understand how the play histories of four individuals inform their facilitative relationship to, provision for, and perceptions of dramatic play in their classroom. In recognizing the value of play history narrative as a reflective practice, teachers can begin to examine play through the lens of their own experiences.

This study was limited by the sample selection of individuals who took part in the

research project in three ways. First, the number of participants was only four, thereby limiting the scope of the project to four experiences, and eliminating any opportunity to make larger generalizations about play history as a format for self-assessment and reflection. Second, the sample was primarily Caucasian and female, giving a limited view of the socio-cultural complexities that encompass the play lives of individuals. Third, the sample was selected from one educational institution that supported a play-based curriculum. Not only did this create a possible conflict between the expectations of the administration and the realities of the teachers' work, but it also limited the possibilities around what this reflective work could do for teachers in an academic setting in which play was not prioritized. These limitations could be addressed by conducting a narrative study that includes a larger, more diverse population in multiple locations.

This reflective process casts the teacher as an individual with particular personal and professional ideas about what constitutes valuable play and exposes an area in need of critical examination. In the critical work around children's play, multiple perspectives problematize teaching and childhood, (Blaise, 2005; Johnson, 2005; MacNaughton, 2009), exposing the possibility that adult intervention in play could prioritize modalities of play that may not be congruent with the interests, needs or culture of individuals (MacNaughton, 2009; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). By simply walking into a classroom, the participant's culture, familial background and experiences with play, are ever present, shaping their theoretical perceptions of play and all the possible pre-conceived notions about play that come with their particular context, for better or worse. This is of importance when one considers that the meaning of children's play does not follow one particular context, but rather, it contains a multitude of meanings driven by

the context of each individual child (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014). The hope, is that a reflective process such as this creates space for teachers to reflect upon their past in such a way, that it enhances an awareness of a possible imbalance in play pedagogy. If this type of reflective process is held critically, teachers are given the opportunity to examine themselves and their actions and to make pedagogical change (Calderhead, 1989).

Every day, in every classroom, teachers walk in the door with at least two things: a history and a personal pedagogy. This study examined the possibility that history and pedagogy do not live separately, but rather, they inform one another. When teachers are viewed as dynamic individuals with varied sources of contextual influence on pedagogy, (Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta and La Paro, 2006) the personal and the professional are inextricable.

Within the current academic climate, time and space for play is of the utmost importance. The gatekeepers of play are teachers; those who are in the classroom every day, making pedagogical choices that incorporate or exclude play for the children in their classrooms. Providing a platform for teachers to understand their play pedagogy from a more holistic perspective and to self-identify where they really playfully shine in their classrooms— creates space for teachers to think of themselves as skilled players—a play asset to the classroom, and thus more invested in the play of their students. This investment is a crucial one, given today's academic climate in early education—and the disappearance of play.

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APPENDIX A**Participant Questionnaire**

Thank you for taking a moment to fill this out. I look forward to working with you!

Name:
Age:
Are you willing to participate in this study?
Current Classroom:
Years of teaching experience:
Age range of children you have worked with throughout your career:
Where were you born?
What are the places you lived from birth through age 18?
What would you consider your socio-economic status growing up?
What would you consider your cultural background?

APPENDIX B

Interview 1 Protocol

Family

Tell me about the members of your family, starting with your parents.

Did you play with your siblings? What would you play?

Were your parents playful? How did they engage with play?

How would you describe your childhood play? Can you give some examples?

Spaces and Materials (prompt if they don't come up)

You spent a lot of your childhood in (location). Can you describe the area to me?

What were the spaces in the surrounding area, and your home that stick out the most to you? Probe: Can you walk me through your childhood home? What would you be doing in those spaces?

How did kids in your area spend their time? Probe: Why do you think they were drawn to that?

What childhood toys/materials do you remember playing with in these spaces?

School

Where did you go to school? What do you remember about your early experiences in school? What were you drawn to? What didn't interest you?

Walk me through an afterschool afternoon when you were young.

Adult Play

How do you spend your down time now?

Do you consider yourself playful How so?

How would you define the word play?

APPENDIX C

Interview 2 Protocol

Teacher History

How did you end up here at this school?

What do you remember about the topic of play in your teacher education?

How do you see play, as it pertains to children's lives and children's education?

Classroom

If I asked the children to describe how you play with them, what would they say?

How do you see your role in relation to that play? Could you give me some examples?

How do the students in your classroom like to play?

What do you like to do when children are playing?

Reflection

What have you noticed about yourself as a player since taking part in this research project?

What have you noticed about yourself as a play facilitator since taking part in this research project?

Have you noticed any changes in the way you view or interact with your students play? If so what?

In our first interview, you defined play as _____. Are there any changes you want to make to that definition? If so, what?

APPENDIX D

Observation Checklist

Date and Time:

Free Play? Y/N

Classroom:

Teacher Observed:

Description of the room:

Context of the setting

Children's activities:

Roles inhabited by teachers (Jones & Reynolds, 2011)

<i>Play Activities</i> Guiding Mediating Playing Telling	Scribing Communicating Stage managing Planning Other_____
<i>Non-Play activities</i> Prepping Planning Facilitating table work (Academic or Art)	Observing Social Activities Other_____

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Protocol

1) *Play histories.* Teachers will be asked to share a specific play memory they had while taking part in the entrance interview. This will be an open ended conversation.

- Welcome everyone. I'm so happy that we can all be together to share our collective experiences thus far. I would like to begin by opening the floor to the group, for a moment to share any thoughts or reflections on the first interview in which we discussed play as it pertained to childhood. Does anyone want to begin by sharing a memory with the group?
 - What surprised you?
 - What have you noticed about your own teaching and playing since recalling these memories?

2) *Practice.* This portion of the focus group will be devoted to investigating the role of play in the classroom. Teachers will engage with one another of play in their classroom

- What have you noticed about how students play in your classroom?
- When do you choose to engage in play activities?
- What role do you take in those moments? (co-player, mediator, guide etc.).

This portion will include excerpts from my field observations in the classroom so that teachers can reflect on specific facilitative choices they have made.

- In my observation I noticed X, can you tell us a bit about your thinking there?
Why did you make the choices you did in that moment?

3) *Synthesis* To narrow in on the location in which play history and play practice meet, teachers will discuss the events of the focus group and reflect on the process thus far.