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The Vital Benefits of Play

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A Literature Review Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

Abstract

This literature review focuses on the importance of play for children. There are two types of play: child-directed play (unstructured) and teacher-directed play (structured). This literature review uses scholarly articles and information to go deeply into the types and benefits of play. Free play, play-based learning and guided play are the few this literature review that discuss their benefits for children. Play helps children in academically, social-emotional, language, self regulation and builds executive functions. Although play has all these benefit factors for children's development, this literature review will discuss the decline of recess in elementary school in the United States. Educators can implement recess, unstructured and structured play for the children to gain the nurturing benefits play offers.

The Vital Benefits of Play

Early childhood education is the beginning foundation for young children to succeed academically and socially for their future. During early education, structured (adult-led) and unstructured (child-led) play is essential to children on many levels. Through play, children explore the world in a safe environment, create constraints, imagine, and pretend, and collaborate with peers and adult caretakers. Play can be creative, messy, and physical, essential to academic achievement (Civitello, 2016).

However, with the ongoing research on the value of play, unstructured recess play in elementary schools has been limited or utterly opt-out recess from the school day. The policymakers and school districts reduced recess for more academic teachings, advanced school accountability, student testing, an extensive curriculum, and government penalty for poorly performing schools. (Parrott et al.2020; Berez and Sheets, 2017). Researchers believe there is a conflict between race and class lines, with more prestigious and white schools having more flexible recess policies with the benefits of play for their students (Parrott et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be seen as a social justice issue because of location, region, and ethnicity enrollment (Parrott et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the problem is that decreasing the recess time of unstructured free play delays the many benefits of unstructured play and physical activity for all children (Berez and Sheets, 2017).

This literature review examines the many reasons unstructured and structured play is essential for children developmentally. This literature review will help educators, administrators, and parents to understand the importance of play in children's development. The literature discusses the various plays researched by different scholars regarding quality play-based,

pretend, free, outdoor, block, and guided play, then explain how those types of play benefit children.

Researched articles from within the last ten years from the Northwestern College academic database are included in this literature review. The researched studies and participants that are in this literature have been tested from various countries, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and schools that helped them with their hypothesized studies. This literature review explains the value of play and why play benefits children from all demographics and socioeconomic statuses. This literature review explains how educators and parents can enhance a child's learning and development through the practice of play. Researchers O'Neill et al., (2012), Weisberg et al., (2013), Parrott et al., (2020) all agree that unstructured and structured play helps children socially, emotionally, cognitively, physically, self-regulation, mathematical thinking, and complex language interactions.

The literature review goes in-depth about the benefits of unstructured outdoor play for both children and their caregivers or parents. Next, the review will discuss the highlights and importance of unstructured dramatic, pretend play, and block play. Then the review explains the important topics of structured and unstructured play, such as guided play, play-based learning, and the decline in play in schools.

Review of the Literature

Free Play

Children's everyday experiences are vital for cognitive development and beginning self-awareness, social skills, and individualism (Tayler, 2015). From an infant, children's experiences involve play. Children learn by experiencing play between other children, adults, and objects in their environments. Play can be independent, quiet, and reflective, or it can be enjoyed with peers during active play (Edwards, 2017). In a social play environment, a child's social development skills could change from intrapersonal to interpersonal being by engaging with other peers (Tayler, 2015). Engaging children in active play serves a critical role in young children social, affective, and cognitive development (O'Neill et al., 2014)

Play is a fundamental tool for effective learning and development in children (Fatai et al., 2014). An observational qualitative study conducted by Fatai and his team (2014) explored how free play contributes to children's learning. The participants were 30 children ages three to five in kindergarten. During the study some children played in groups or played in solitude. All children were engaged in one activity or more until their teacher assisted the children back to their classrooms. Researchers observed patterns and themes among students who participated in different types of play, such as the children's collaborative skills and use of imitation in play. The study showed free play helps young children learn through trial and error, which helps them gain new insights (Fatai et al., 2014).

In addition to trial-and error learning, unstructured play benefits conceptual learning in preschool-aged children. A cognitive development study implemented by Sim & Xu (2017), used mixed-method research to measure if children aged two and three form the basis for larger conceptual structures through free play. There were four unique experiments with these two and three-year-old toddler girls and boys. The first experiment observed 32 children ages two to three years old. Researchers looked at whether they could pick out the correct three blocks of different

shapes and colors from didactic learning. Children in this group were allowed 30 seconds of free play with the blocks before receiving instructions from the researcher. Children in this group were successful in picking out the correct blocks from the prior instructions (Simj & Xu, 2017). The second experiment observed 24 two and three-year -old children placing each block on top of a “blicket” machine that were activated using a shape rule: a shape-match a block had to be used to activate the machine. Children in this group were also allowed 30 seconds of free play with the blocks before receiving instructions from the researcher on how the machines worked. This group of children was successful in activating the machines. This result suggested to researchers that children successfully processed how to complete the task during unstructured play time. The third experiment was similar to the second experiment where children were tasked with activating the machines by using shape-match blocks. But in this experiment, a person gives the building blocks to the child during free play. The participants of the third experiment were 32 two and three-year-old children. The results of the trial did not differ from the other two experiments, even with blocks given to the child (Sim & Xu, 2017). The final trial was a control experiment, where 12 two and three-year-olds children were observed trying to activate the machines with no prior training or free play. The experiment showed that without any prior training or free play, the children were unsuccessful at the generalization tests. This indicates that free play and self-directed learning supports higher-order generalizations and lays the foundation for building larger conceptual structures and natural thinking (Sim & Xu, 2017).

Research suggests unstructured free play including mindfulness activities can assist with happiness and positive health among preschoolers. Lee et al., (2020) performed a quasi-experiment study in Hong Kong regarding unstructured free play and mindfulness interventions among children in early childhood. The participants were 42 children aged 4 to 6 years old in

two kindergarten classes. One kindergarten class was assigned as the control group and the other was the intervention group. The intervention group was allowed one hour of unstructured play outdoors each day. The children played with paper boxes, hula hoops, bean bags, cones, car tires, tree sticks, art supplies such as paper and paint. After the unstructured play, the children participated in a mindfulness activity that lasted 15 minutes daily. During the mindfulness activity the instructor read the children a story, practiced deep-breathing exercises and taught the children to be aware of their body and feelings. The control group had recess and then their same routine as usual. The playtime for the control group was one hour and without any mindfulness activities. Lee et al., (2020) examined the effectiveness of unstructured play materials in addition to a mindfulness intervention in aiding physical activity, emotional function, peer collaboration and playfulness among preschoolers compared with those who play in kindergarten.

Lee et al., (2020) used questionnaires for the parents, pedometers, weight scales and psychometric scales to measure the children's data. The children wore a pedometer on their pants during play. The Smiley Face Likert Scale was used to measure the children's emotional wellbeing after play. The children were asked to choose the face expression that reflected their level of happiness before and after play. The Children's Emotional Manifestation Scale was used to observe the behaviors of the children (Lee et al., 2020). This scale was completed before and after play, the trained rater's interviewed the children and rated the children "1= positive emotion" to "5 = negative emotion". The Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale was used to examine the children's social skills and behaviors during play (Lee et al., 2020). Parents and teachers had to fill out questionnaires and rate the children on a four point scale from "1=never took part" to "4=always took part". The Test of Playfulness Scale was used to test the child's positioning to engage in play (e.g. the amount of time the child behavior was observed, the strength of the

behavior and the creativity of the behavior) 20 minutes of playtime was recorded each day, and the children's play was scored after observing. The results were that unstructured play that followed by mindfulness activities is effective in helping students with happiness and playfulness. This can help the children with their physical, cognitive and emotional self-regulation skills. For future research, a longer intervention could be implemented and a waitlist control group should be considered so all children could benefit from the intervention with the mindfulness activity (Lee et al., 2020).

Unstructured play, especially pretend play, has been shown to have an impact on self-regulation. (Slot et al, 2017; Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin, 2020; Li et al., 2014; Goldstein & Lerner, 2017). Slot, Mulder, Verhagen, and Leseman (2017) examined how pretend play affected preschooler's cognitive and emotional self-regulation. Self-regulation is a crucial stage for school readiness for preschoolers because self-regulation behavior is related to the cognitive and executive control functions (Blair & Ursache, 2011, as cited in Slot et al., 2017). Executive control functions are related to the brain functions such as completing tasks, and following directions (Slot et al., 2017). Slot, Mulder, Verhagen and Leseman (2017) conducted several experiments to investigate the degree to which three-year-old children showed cognitive and emotional self-regulation in a naturalistic play setting and test-based measures of children's cool and hot executive functions (EF). The cool executive functions are working memory, maintaining attention and cognitive flexibility. Hot executive functions are self-awareness skills used in intense situations or conflicts (Slot et al., 2017). EF is defined as higher-order thinking processes that regulate thoughts and behaviors that has been identified as a significant predictor of children's proximal and distal development (Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin, 2020).

The first experiment Slot et al., (2017) observed the children on their cognitive and emotional self-regulation skills in a dramatic play kitchen setting. The classrooms were visited twice during the mornings and children and educators were videotaped for 15 to 20 minutes in four sessions. Two sessions were a regular everyday routine such as mealtime and free play. The other two sessions were guided play where the researcher provided the dramatic play kitchen. The second experiment used a similar setup and assessed the children's cool and hot executive functions, and the observers measured the quality of pretend play. The result showed that preschoolers are able to implement their cognitive and emotional self-regulation skills and engage during pretend play. The children showed metacognitive regulation meaning children are in control or planning activities during pretend play. However, the benefits to emotional self-regulation were still limited, because even though the children were able to manage their feelings, conflicts with peers still disrupted their play (Slot et al., 2017).

Pretend play can improve children's social development and self-regulation, which can positively impact emotional development, academic performance in childhood, and later life success (Goldstein & Lerner, 2017; Slot et al., 2017). Goldstein & Lerner (2017) conducted a research study that included ninety-seven children for a federally funded head start pre-kindergarten program. The participants were from four full classrooms: two had 19 children, one had 20 children, and one had 18 children. All the children's families had low economic statuses. The children were randomly assigned to dramatic pretend play games, block building, or story time.

Researchers measured whether the children received "Help (by measuring the children's tendency to help someone if they needed assistance)" or "Responses to Distress (by measuring the children's assisting comfort or no attempt to comfort the individual that needed help) "

during play. They examined the emotional states (e.g., self-management, social awareness, and peer partnership skills) of the children in their imaginary pretend play. According to the results, Goldstein & Lerner (2017), when children play pretend games, they have lower levels of negative social behaviors. The results showed that dramatic pretend play eased self-distress. This evidence means that if the children in this study are distressed, pretend play can increase to positive social interactions. However, the researchers found that children who participated in pretend play as animals or human characters showed improved emotional control and social self-regulation. However, unstructured pretend play was shown to not necessarily impact empathy and the ability to understand other behavior, which shows a limitation for the role of play in the development of certain social and emotional skills. Similar to Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020), the Goldstein & Lerner (2017) study also suggests young children from low-income backgrounds can particularly benefit from dramatic pretend play games for young children. The dramatic pretend play activity resulted in lower personal stress on two measures of emotional control compared to either block play or story time (Goldstein & Lerner, 2017).

A similar qualitative study by Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) looked at how pretend play impacts self-regulation. Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) study included 188 preschoolers between ages 4 and 5 years old. For part of the study, researchers interviewed teachers about their children's emotional regulation and their pretend play behaviors. The Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) study also interviewed the children individually to test their executive functioning skills. Two years later when the children were in first grade, Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) interviewed and reassessed the same students again. Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) found that there is a strong relationship between pretend play and EF in early childhood, but the relationship is dependent on a child's temperament, specifically their ability to

regulate their emotions. Emotion regulation (ER) defines one's ability to monitor, evaluate, and change their emotional responses. Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin (2020) hypothesized that the relationship between pretend play and EF would be stronger among children with poor ER skills than peers with more advanced ER abilities. The hypothesis of Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin's study (2020) was supported that children with poor emotional regulation have more to gain from engaging in pretend play. Among the children in their study with poor emotion regulation, those who were reported to engage in more pretend play showed better EF over time than their peers who engaged in low levels of pretend play. This suggests that children who have poor emotional regulation skills will benefit the most from free play (Thibodeau-Nielsen & Gilpin, 2020).

Studies have shown that pretend play in unstructured environments is positively associated with the development of children's social skills (Li et al., 2014). Researchers Li et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study of the relationship between pretend play and social skills in an outdoor environment. The participants were eighteen boys, and ten girls ages four to five years old from different child-care centers. Researchers observed the children over six days within two weeks at each daycare center. Teachers were asked to complete the social skills questionnaire on each participating child. Li et al., (2014) found that students who engaged in high amounts of pretend play scored higher in their teacher's assessments of their social skills. Social pretend play is more closely related to children's social skills than solitary pretend play. Social pretend play also appears to have the strongest association with all types of social skills such as assertiveness, cooperation, and self-control (Li et al., 2014). The outdoor setting had many opportunities for active pretend play and unstructured social interactions with their peers (Li et al., 2014). The outdoors setting gives the children a chance to practice emotional skills, including problem solving, turn-taking, encouragement, self-control, safe risk-taking, and

following the rules of a game (Kinsner, 2019). Being outdoors invites children to explore skills in natural science, STEM skills, and the environment. It also creates opportunities for social interactions and collaboration promotes physical health while providing children a chance to take proper risks which lead to better learning outcomes since children return to other activities, and it anchors children to the real world (Kinsner, 2019). However, children with language delays in social skills have challenging time to attend the environment or join other peers. Therefore, the children may need direct instruction from educators to facilitate in play opportunities, while building their social skills (Dennis & Stockall, 2014).

Schools that allow for unstructured play time outside can better support the development of young children, according to the Kinsner study (2019). Free play provides better physical and mental health, improved sleep, and cognitive, social, and emotional gains for young children. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a "prescription for play" at every well-child visit (Yogman et al., 2018). Nemours Health and Prevention Services recommends daily supervised outdoor time for children from infancy to age five (Hughes, 2009, as cited in Kinsner, 2019). Nemours calls for toddlers to have at least 30 minutes of guided play activity and 60 minutes of free play activity each day (Hughes, 2009, as cited in Kinsner, 2019).

Some researchers recommend unstructured play with building blocks during free play as an essential way for children to develop blended social language, such as using spatial language and various unique forms to build their ideas. A structure used by Gold et al. (2020) examined block building as a form of play that supports early engineering skills. The engineering play structure focuses on skills such as social skills, creating, and building, interpret how things are built or work, solving problems and replicating solutions, testing solutions, and estimate designs,

creating innovative ideas, following patterns and prototypes, and thinking logically and mathematically, and using technical language (Gold et al., 2020).

Gold et al., (2015) conducted an observation research of 68 preschool children ages 3 to 5 years old from two classrooms in a university laboratory and two classrooms from Head Start Center. Two graduate student research assistants visited each preschool classroom weekly to observe the children in three play settings. The play settings were Imagination playground (both indoor and outdoor play activities with large lightweight blocks), traditional playground (was outdoors with slides, swings, ladders, playhouses, and sandboxes), and dramatic play (was indoors in each classroom with play kitchen, toys, dolls and dress up clothing). The observation results were that children participated in design and construction in Imagination playground, followed by dramatic play and then playground. Therefore, the engineering and mathematics behaviors were observed higher in dramatic play and in the imagination playground. Their research suggested that preschoolers who engaged in more engineering play perform better on assessments of mathematical knowledge, like numbering geometry, spatial ability, like rotating and transforming shapes, and planning skills, such as tracing a correct path over patterns on a page (Gold,2015; Gold et al., 2020).

Unstructured play with building blocks can benefit children with mathematical thinking and their building complexity (Trawick-Smith et al., 2017). Another study on block play by Trawick-Smith, Swaminathan, Baton, Danieluk, Marsh and Szawacki, (2017) examined and video-recorded 41 children in preschool playing with blocks. Trawick-Smith, Swaminathan, Baton, Danieluk, Marsh and Szawacki, (2017) measured how block-building plays impact mathematical thinking. They conducted the research measuring the children's frequency of block

structures, complexity of the block structures, social and teacher participation, and the percentage of building without toys.

Despite the values of unstructured play, many researchers are concerned about a decrease in unstructured play time, as recess time is reduced and eliminated in many school districts (Parrott et al., (2020) ; Brez & Sheets (2017)). There has been significant public interest and debate over policies regarding how much recess children should have during school (Parrott & Cohen, 2021). School districts are prioritizing many other issues that impact the school day, like student testing, intense curriculums, and improving accountability. Poorly performing schools also have to deal with government penalties (Parrott et al., (2020) ; Brez & Sheets (2017)). In order to lessen these challenges, many schools reduced their recess time or eliminated recess from the school day (Parrott & Cohen, 2021). The reduction in recess is potentially harmful to children as recess is essential for allowing children unstructured free playtime and increasing physical activity, which positively affects the well-being and development of children (Brez & Sheets, 2017).

Unstructured recess play is an important factor in children's school performance. In a study about the importance of unstructured play/recess in schools, Parrott & Cohen (2021) used mixed method study observing children's play periods and using interviews with children and teachers. The participants were one hundred children from grades kindergarten to fifth grade who were included in the ten-week session in the fall and ten-week session in the spring experiment. Parrott & Cohen (2021) observed the children's physical behavior, passive watching, and language behaviors. Their findings were that more extended play periods give students valuable time to work cooperatively. The children felt the recess was necessary, and after play, they were ready for school. The children's moods improved during play, making new friends (Parrott &

Cohen, 2021). Teachers expressed that the benefits of unstructured play in the school develop focus, working cooperatively, and working through problems with adult intervention (Parrott & Cohen, 2021).

Free play is extremely beneficial for children and should be considered as an essential part of the day in school. A similar study about the importance of unstructured recess conducted by Brez & Sheets (2017) regarding the benefits of recess on children's cognitive skills and academic performance in the classroom (Brez & Sheets, 2017). Their methodology was different because they tested before and after recess for cognitive measures of attention and creativity. Brez & Sheets (2017) observed ninety-nine children from elementary schools from two districts. Children were in third, fourth and fifth grade. Brez & Sheets (2017) observed the children before and after students left for recess. To measure the students' attention, they asked the children to read a brief passage before and after recess. They instructed students to cross out every letter 'e' that they came across the passage. The score for this experiment is the total number of 'e's that were correctly marked (Brez & Sheets, 2017). To measure the creativity, students were given one of two daily uses items (a spoon or paperclip). Next, students were asked what the items were used for and asked an alternative way to use them. To measure the executive function, they used the Trail Making Test version A and B (Brez & Sheets, 2017). In the version A students were asked to connect the dots from 1 to 25. Version B the students were asked to connect the dot with numbers and letters alternating between the two (e.g. 1, A, 2, B, 3, C etc.). However, version B was recognized to be difficult for the children, so the researcher eliminated version B. to measure students while engaged in cognitive, attention and creativity activities. Last, the children filled out questionnaires about where on the playground they played and which peers

they played with during recess. The teachers filled out a questionnaire regarding the children's gender, conscientiousness, creativity, and personality (Brez & Sheets, 2017).

The results from the study showed they found significant increases in sustained attention after recess as opposed to before. However, the results did not show recess has any impact on creativity. Different play areas had different effects on children's performance in the classroom (Brez & Sheets, 2017). Different play environments can influence children's subsequent behavior. For example, modern playgrounds stimulate creativity more than traditional playgrounds. Recess can serve different purposes for different children, for example, extroverted vs. introverted (Brez & Sheets, 2017).

In addition, Turner et al., (2013) conducted a qualitative study to whether district policies were implementing schools practices in regards to withholding recess for behavior or academic reasons. Turner et al., (2013) used surveys to collect the data from administrators at United States public elementary schools during the spring of 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 years. Their results were that students were not held back from their recess activity due to their poor behavior or academic reasons at 28.3% and 26% of elementary schools. However, withholding recess was less common in the southern United States due to strong district policies with withholding students from their recess versus the West, Midwest and Northeast (Turner et al., (2013). These results show that a revision needed of stronger district policies to eliminate withholding physical activities such as recess may help students gain the benefits of unstructured recess.

Play-based Learning

Educators valued open-ended play because it allowed children to explore materials and understand the possibilities and properties of the materials they were using, and children enjoyed open-ended play because it was fun, exciting, and often messy (Edwards, 2017). In contrast, structured play is valued by teachers because they could directly show concepts to children. Therefore, with the high demand of academic expectations and standards to be learned in early childhood, educators are becoming familiar with the role of play into the classrooms such as play-based learning. Play-based learning allows teachers to focus on the children's interests, abilities, academic, social, and emotional development through engaging with the children (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Children often enjoy this kind of play because the teacher showed them what to do (Edwards, 2017). The purposefully framed play was vital because it enabled the teachers to build childhood experiences and introduce new ideas using various songs, books, posters, and videos. Children also enjoyed being able to talk with the teacher and learning new things. Each play type was equally valued; they just offered qualitatively different opportunities for learning and teaching.

All play-types are equal in their developmental value, and they can be used in multiple ways to support learning (Edwards, 2017; Keung & Cheung, 2019). The unstructured or structured learning is through which children create and form sense in their worlds, as they participate fully with people, objects, and environments. According to educators, the relationship between play and teaching has been difficult to manage by integrating vital academic standards into a play-based learning experience (Edwards, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2019). In addition, educators also reflected the challenges of involving different stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, and policy-makers) in engaging play guidance and providing ongoing support to construct effective play-based learning for young children (Keung & Cheung, 2019). (Edwards, 2017) had

primarily established that play-based learning alone did not support children's skills of content knowledge. The literature suggests educators need to perform some role in the play experiences provided to children to enable content learning. Edwards tested three types of play: open-ended play [free play], modeled play [structured play], and purposefully framed play [adult-directed activities] (Edwards, 2017).

Learning the Pedagogical Play-Framework helped Edwards (2017) to integrate play and teaching into her lessons. The reason for the study is to examine the concepts and strategies related to teachers' planning to apply to the three play types (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2013). The participants of the study were one hundred and fourteen children ages four to five years old and 16 teachers from sixteen early learning centers in Australia. The experiment assigned two groups of teachers and children to each of the three play types: free play, structured play, and adult-directed activities. Across several rounds, each group rotated through the three types of play, and repeated. Edwards & Mackenzie, (2013) discovered from the educator's feedback that educators prefer the strategies for modelled and purposeful play than open-ended play alone (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2013). Open-ended play involves educators supplying the materials to the children with a suggestive concept and the educator has minimal engagement. Modelled-play involves play experiences where the teacher illustrates, explains and models the use of the materials before letting the children proceed to the activity with minimal adult assistance. Purposefully framed play involves the teacher providing children with materials and discussing the concept of the activity, followed by opportunities for open-play, modelled play and the teacher and child are engaged throughout the activity (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2013). However, all three play-types are equally valued for the unique contribution they make to the richness of the young child's world, which makes for rich imaginations (Edwards, 2017).

In addition to play, guided play is when an educator intergrate scaffolded learning objectives while remaining child-directed (Weisberg et al., 2013; Cavanaugh et al., 2016) . The children can choose their following activities and focus without constant help from a teacher (Weisberg et al., 2013). Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013) insist that guided play can provide the same academic developmental result because the approach creates a learning environment that encourages children to engage in play and learning. Weisberg et al. (2013) analyzed a body of studies on structured play to distinguish guided play from other methods and explore why guided play is a strong tool for young children (Weisberg et al., 2013). The analysis showed preschool children benefit from a curriculum that is structured and rich in cognitive stimulation. The guided play focuses on children's learning, engaging, and exploration, which is beneficial for preschoolers' education (Weisberg et al., 2013). However, children with language delays can build their communication skills, enhance their problem solving, and improve social competence with the assistance of educators providing a welcoming environment by bringing toys or books that meet the children's needs (Dennis & Stockall, 2014).

Research by Cavanaugh et al., (2016), explored the development of literacy-rich sociodramatic guided play in kindergarten. Cavanaugh et al., (2016) participants were in two kindergartens at different public schools in the United States. One kindergarten class had 20 students and the other had 21 students. The study examined the outcomes of frequent tests in the grade level literacy skills. Each of the two classrooms was divided into two groups (A and B). Group A was the control group and group B was the experimental group in both classrooms. Then after 3 weeks (midpoint) the groups switched research conditions for example group (A) for 3 weeks and then for next 3 weeks group (A) is now group (B) the experimental group.

The materials that were used in the literacy- rich guided play study was a set of ten to twenty miniature toys, all starting with the same letter and sound inside two containers labeled with the initial letter. The teacher removed the items one at a time, saying the sound of the object, name and placing it on the table spaced out from the other objects and following through with the second container (Cavanaugh et al., 2016). Students that were in the A group used the literacy guided-play activity, that the teacher conducted where they removed the items one at a time, saying the sound of the object and students B group did the guided play once and then were instructed to invent their own activities that practiced the initial sound of words (Cavanaugh et al., 2016).

The next activity was a rhyming consonant-vowel-consonant word family was inserted in a plastic bag. For the guided play activity, the teacher removed the items from the plastic bag and turned the letter-side upward. Next, the teacher lays the letters for the rhyming word endings and then chooses one of the remaining consonants and places it at the beginning of the rhyme to make a word. Next, the teacher says the word and finds the miniature toy that is the meaning of the word and continues until all words have been made (Cavanaugh et al., 2016). In this activity group A used the guided play activity and students in the experimental group used the guided play activity once and then were asked to make their own activities that practiced word family concepts (Cavanaugh et al., 2016).

The Cavanaugh study used the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills in the study's data collection. The methods of data collection that Cavanaugh et al., (2016) used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), teachers tallying of time the targeted initial sounds were used in students journals and teacher observations of students behaviors during the experiment and control activities. The results from the DIBELS reflected

that students at both schools who were in group B (experimental) had positive effects in the activities. Educators each week examined the students' journals and tallied the number of times the student correctly used the initial sounds, the data shows that group B succeeded in the initial sounds tasks (Cavanaugh et al., 2016). Last, the observations from educators on their students' behaviors was that the students were motivated to develop the games in the activities. EF skills were advanced as students' social skills and communication increased with their peers during the guided play games (Cavanaugh et al., 2016). Cavanaugh et al., (2016) suggestions for further research will possibly be studied in a large-scale population to make the study more observable. Another would be implementing the experiment for a longer time to get more powerful productive effects (Cavanaugh et al., 2016).

In relation to literacy and language-rich guided play, children's concepts and comprehension can be increased with guided play supported with a scaffolding determined by educators (Massey, 2012). Play scaffolded by educators supports language skills by extending conversations with the children and asking open-ended questions which allows children to talk more during play (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019). According to Hadley & Dickinson, (2019), they presented a study that investigated the emotional, language, and social cues that were associated with preschoolers growth in word-learning during shared book-reading and guided play activities. This study had 30 children from three preschool classrooms from a state funded school in the United States. Children were assigned to a mixed gender playgroup of three and the children remained in the group during the two month intervention (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019).

The experiment was conducted over a theme of "Growing Things", and included one book about vegetables and another about flowers (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019). They tested the children on book-reading and then it was guided play. In the book reading activity which

included pictures of various plants and other growing things including target words. The target words were taught during the book-reading. Guided play was a ten minute play session immediately after the book reading (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019). The data was collected by video recording all sessions with the students, after examining all the content the results were exemplary. The children showed excellent growth in vocabulary knowledge. Their findings also suggested that preschoolers' word-learning is supported with child-led, than adult-led, interaction about words. These results show that book-reading and guided-play are settings in which language can be supported (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019).

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the reasons unstructured and structured play is vital for children developmentally. This research was intended for other educators, administrators, policy-makers and parents to understand why we need to implement play indoors and outdoors, and increase recess activities time in elementary schools.

Educators deal with challenges of the types of play but the main two are child-directed play and teacher-directed play. As we learned, child-direction is free play. Free play children have unlimited choices and flexibility and imagine their own play (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Free play helps with social skills, physical development and self regulation. Teacher-directed play is controlled by the educators and students. This play is more focused on academically learning opportunities, but has free play among the direction activity. Educators facilitate conversation by asking open-ended questions to engage the children in their thinking and communication skills, playing along, consider alternative perspectives, and how to use other materials to prolong play.

These two types of play benefit children's social and emotional skills, academic learning, and executive functioning skills (Taylor & Boyer, 2019).

Last, Turner et al., (2013) research has been proven that in US elementary schools, teachers still retain recess for academic or conduct management reasons. However, school districts are in the process of developing stronger policies to restrict holding back recess for children. Recess has many benefits for children behavioral, academic, cognitive and emotional developmental, attentive, moods, problem solving, social skills and collaboration with peers. These recent studies have shown the importance of play and can be understood to benefit the children.

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