Preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play

Karen Smit

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by

Karen Smit

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SUPERVISOR
Dr. M. Botha

CO-SUPERVISOR
Prof. C.G. Hartell

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SUMMARY

Learning through play is a universal concept that has been studied and applied since the 1800's. Various theorists, scholars and authors have provided information and research on why learning through play is the best way for young children to learn.

In South Africa there is a dilemma on implementing learning through play due to various influences and contributing factors. That is why this study gained insight into how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play.

The conceptual framework of this study used different lenses of looking at learning through play. These lenses were established by reviewing the relevant literature. The conceptual framework was then used to structure questions and methods for use during the collection of the data. The data was summarised, organised and eventually analysed.

This study applied a qualitative case study design to investigate five preschool teachers' experiences, ideas and conceptions of learning through play. Data was collected from these preschool teachers through semi-structured interviews, documents (photovoices and lesson plans) and journal keeping (field notes). The data analyses and findings support the themes and subthemes that emerged. The findings suggest that preschool teachers are in favour of learning through play, but due to various influences and factors it is not always implemented successfully.

KEY WORDS

- Preschool teacher
- Understanding learning through play
- The implementation of play pedagogy
- Learning through play
- Learning environment

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ACRONYMS

AASP	Activity Apperception Story Procedure
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education degree
B.Prim.Ed.	Bachelor of Primary Education degree
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DoE	Department of Education
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Child Education and Care
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
Grade "R"	"Reception Year"
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SANCF	South African National Curriculum Framework
SAQA	South Africa Qualifications Authority
TV	Television
UKDfE	United Kingdom Department for Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

"The ability to play is instrumental in scientific exploration,
discovery and all forms of creativity!"
Albert Einstein

1.1   INTRODUCTION

In a fast growing technological world where children are expected to perform well academically and meet high standards in terms of achievement, play is viewed by some people as "a waste of time ... messy ... unstructured and uneducational" (Ochiogu, 2013: 87). The assumption of play being regarded as a less structured way to educate young children causes relevant stakeholders such as headmasters, parents and preschool teachers to question how young children should be educated. Stakeholders, as mentioned above, try to address challenges to improve children's academic performance which means preschools prepare children for primary school by employing "teacher directed academic instruction" (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1988: 212). The latter refers to an approach where teachers, and not children, are at the centre of the learning process (Tullis, 2011). When teachers are at the centre of the learning process, play is not always valued as significant, regardless of the fact that play is an important aspect of pedagogy for children's development and learning (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2008).

Children's development and learning is discussed in the Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001), where the claim is made that children grow and thrive physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and socially. Ebrahim (2012) mentions that some preschools in South Africa are of the opinion that the process of children's growth and development happens by means of children being able to accomplish a number of highly advanced skills such as mathematics and science. When preschool teachers prematurely expose children to formal reading and writing, children present lower academic success in later years (Elkind, 2007). It seems that many preschool teachers believe that they should prepare children for formal schooling by supposedly offering young children the advancement of knowledge and skills. In actuality pressuring children to meet the standards and pressures of a demanding society prevents them from developing optimally (Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

It seems appealing that children should perform highly advanced academic tasks and read and write at an early age (Elkind, 2007), however, understanding how preschool children learn best will ultimately help preschool teachers to assist children to reach their full potential. In order to understand how children learn best one needs to step away from the idea of children mastering skills that are not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate (Walsh, Sproule,

McGuinness, Trew & Ingram, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Children's learning should be fostered by a learning practice where children are at the centre of the learning process and where they are allowed to develop according to age-appropriate developmental standards (Papatheodorou, 2003; Walsh et al., 2010).

Realizing that children learn best through play and that play is what leads to learning (Brock, Dodds, Yarvis & Olusoga, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003) forms the starting point from where children can learn and develop appropriately. This is supported by Broadhead (2006) who point out that play is important to children and enhances various cognitive, physical, emotional and social benefits. Bodrova and Leong (2007) elaborate on the benefits of play by stating that children who engage in quality play experiences show well-developed memory skills, language development and regulated behaviour which leads to academic learning. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) state that children in Grade R should be given the opportunity to "enhance the understanding of concepts" during free play (DoBE, 2014: 16). It can be argued that if children in Grade R can understand concepts by playing freely, children pre-Grade R could benefit even more (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Barros and Aguiar (2010); Clasquin-Johnson (2011); Hughes (2010); Kangas, (2010); Koralek (2004); Walsh and Petty (2007) all argue that play has immense value as it can be a constructive, efficient and productive way in which children learn and develop. Little, Sandsetter and Wyver (2012) found that children master basic and complex skills best through spontaneous play. The value of play in enhancing learning among preschool children is also underlined by Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997); Hyvonen and Kangas (2007); Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2006); Kangas (2010); Moyles (2012).

In South Africa there seems to be confusion and a lack of knowledge among preschool teachers regarding how 3-5 year old children should learn and develop as well as how learning through play should be implemented (UNICEF, 2012b; DoBE, 2009). The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play. This study explored the views and opinions of preschool teachers and the practical strategies applied by preschool teachers to enhance learning while children play. The knowledge, skills and experiences of preschool teachers were studied to determine which strategies are employed and the efficacy thereof. Strategies, as indicated by the literature, were also reviewed to provide recommendations for implementing learning through play. A conceptual framework, designed from the literature, was used to guide the study and collect data by means of a qualitative research approach. Five preschool teachers from different preschools participated in the study.

1.2   PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

According to UNICEF (2012b) preschool teachers in South Africa seems to be uncertain and confused about teaching 3-5 year old children, because there is no official preschool curriculum. I agree with Clasquin-Johnson (2011) when she maintains that focus should be

placed on meeting the needs of young children in South Africa and promoting their holistic development and learning. Though most stakeholders agree with the above statement, teachers are still left wondering how to meet the learning and developmental needs of preschool children without a prescribed curriculum.

Trying to address how preschool children's learning and developmental needs can be met leads one to explore how children learn best and it has been mentioned previously – and will frequently be mentioned throughout the study – that preschool children learn best through play (Broadhead, 2006; Brock et al., 2013; Kangas, 2010). To determine how learning through play can be understood and implemented in South Africa may lead to exploring many possibilities and give rise to many questions (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010) as South Africa is a multi-cultural country with multiple views of childhood and the role of play in development (Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012). Theories regarding play and its value will vary with regard to time and place and may be influenced by specific discourses of childhood, education and child development (Ebrahim, 2012; Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012). When reviewing learning through play in different countries from a pedagogical perspective, many researchers agree that play is valuable to children's learning (Excell & Linington, 2008; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007; Langston, 2013; Lau & Cheng, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). The implementation of learning through play seems however to be challenging in various countries (Langston, 2013; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007).

Difficulties in implementing the pedagogy of learning through play may be because of misperceptions of what learning through play truly means (Barros & Aguiar, 2010; Ebrahim, 2014; Lau & Cheng, 2010). The implementation of learning through play in preschools in South Africa is challenging and fragmented, causing discord and confusion (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011; Ebrahim, 2012).

In the South African context it might also be that Early Childhood Education policies do not provide sufficient guidelines for preschool teachers to comprehend and implement the link between play and learning (Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake & Smith, 2013).

This study therefore investigated how preschool teachers, in three preschool settings, teach 3-5 year old children. It also studied how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play in the preschool settings. I portrayed the experiences, ideas and conceptions of preschool teachers regarding learning through play to adequately demonstrate their understanding and implementation of learning through play.

1.2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Preschools in South Africa do not have a curriculum to teach 3-5 year old children. Many preschool teachers do not have adequate training and may lack the knowledge and skills to effectively implement learning through play. This study investigated how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play. It explored the guidelines that preschool

teachers use for implementing learning through play as well as the factors that may influence the implementation of play.

1.2.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is:

How do preschool teachers experience and understand the implementation of learning through play?

The four sub-questions are:

- How do preschool teachers conceptualize and understand learning through play?
- Which guidelines do teachers use when implementing learning through play?
- Which activities and/or strategies do preschool teachers utilize to enhance learning through play?
- Which factors, if any, influence the implementation of learning through play?

1.3   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

I am a preschool teacher who has experienced confusion about how to teach young children in order for them to learn and develop first hand. I have taught at three different preschools in a period of five years and found that there have been no guidelines and therefore no consistency with regards to how children are taught at the different schools. Play was not regarded by some preschool teachers as a useful approach to enhance learning. Children were allowed to play without any educational purpose. After reviewing the literature about learning through play I realised that play is an important strategy to promote learning in preschools. This encouraged me to investigate practices and the utilization of play among preschool teachers.

In South Africa the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a policy document that provides guidelines for teachers to teach knowledge, skills and strategies from Grade R-12 (DoBe, 2014). Pre-Grade R (3-5 year olds) is however not included in the CAPS document and there is no official curriculum statement prescribed by the South African Department of Education for children who are 3-5 years old. A National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) policy does however exist and represents a policy initiative for children from birth to 9 years (DoBe, 2009). This document claims that it should be used to guide early childhood educators and that it is only "a starting point for the development of ... a curriculum" (DoBe, 2009: 5). The South African National Curriculum Framework (SANCF) was released in 2012, but it is only a draft curriculum. After studying the SANCF, I found it to be confusing as it stated that it should "not be used in a prescriptive way" (UNICEF, 2012b: 14). The latter leaves preschool teachers wondering what it is they should be teaching children between the ages of 3-5 years. Neither the NELDS nor the SANCF currently provides sufficient guidance to

preschool teachers on how to educate 3-5 year old children. It does not elaborate on the importance of learning through play or how it should be implemented.

Little research has been done in South Africa relating to how children learn through play, but when reading through the literature from abroad (Kangas, 2010; Koralek, 2004; Walsh & Petty, 2007), it is clear that it is recognised internationally that young children learn best through play (Barros & Aguiar, 2010; Broadhead, 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Hughes, 2010). Hardly any research has been done in South Africa on how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play. The purpose of this study was to investigate preschool teachers' experiences with regard to their understanding and implementation of learning through play.

1.4   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study informs preschool teachers about the importance of learning through play, why it should be better understood, how that insight can be developed and finally, how it can be implemented in preschools. The findings of this study provide guidelines to preschool teachers for the implementation of learning through play. Teachers may find it beneficial to explore the findings as well as the recommendations of this study. Teachers might also be able to adapt their teaching practices to support learning through play when they understand the importance of play to children's development and grasp how they learn through play.

The findings and recommendations of this study provide insight into how play is understood and implemented by preschool teachers in South Africa. The findings and recommendations of this study could be beneficial to preschool teachers, headmasters of preschools, parents and the Department of Education.

1.5   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study was to investigate how five preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play. It also aimed to provide recommendations on how to improve learning through play in the preschool environment.

This study also aimed to:

- Gain insight into how preschool teachers conceptualize and understand learning through play.

- Identify which guidelines teachers use when implementing learning through play.

- Explore activities and/or strategies preschool teachers apply to enhance learning through play.

- Identify which factors, if any, influence the implementation of learning through play.

1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.6.1 PRESCHOOL TEACHER

A preschool teacher in the South African context is sometimes referred to as an Early Childhood Practitioner (UNICEF, 2006). According to the Oxford Dictionary Online (2014) *preschool* is defined as "[r]elating to the time before a child is old enough to go to school". The word *teacher* is defined as "[a] person who teaches, especially in a school" (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2014). In this study a *preschool teacher* will refer to a teacher teaching children between the ages of 3-5 years who practices early childhood development (UNICEF, 2006).

1.6.2 UNDERSTANDING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Understanding is defined by Porter (1913) as: "[t]he act of one who understands a thing, in any sense of the verb; knowledge; discernment; comprehension; interpretation; exaction." The Oxford Dictionary Online (2014) defines the concept *understand* as: "apprehend the meaning or importance of an idea". In this study understanding, understand and understands will refer to preschool teachers' knowledge, comprehension and interpretation of learning through play.

1.6.3 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAY PEDAGOGY

According to the Babylon English Dictionary Online (2014) *implementing* means: "execution, carrying out, performing; putting into effect". Kennedy and Barblett (2010) note that in implementing learning through play relationships between children and teachers influence the way in which children learn. In order for teachers to foster a healthy relationship with children they need to observe children's play and realize that children construct imperative meanings and complex understandings through play. Their role then in this regard is to observe and interpret children's play which in turn enables them to intervene skilfully in ways that enhance children's active participation in play (Ebrahim, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the term 'implementation' will refer to how preschool teachers execute and perform learning through play by teaching. It also refers to the ways in which learning through play is put into effect by teachers.

1.6.4 LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Learning, according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (2014), means to: "acquire knowledge, realize, be aware, discover". Learning through play means children learn something when participating in playful learning activities which include physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (Nicolopoulou, De Sá Ilgaz & Brockmeyer, 2010). This term can also refer to children's ability to use a variety of strategies such as conceptualising, reasoning and problem solving (Kennedy & Barblett, 2010). Learning through play can be put into effect by teachers by perceiving their own role in children's play (Ochiogu, 2013).

In this study, the term 'learning through play' indicates children who learn and develop through play (Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010) by participating in playful activities which stimulate multiple areas of their development.

1.6.5 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In Early Childhood Education the term 'learning environment' refers to the physical location where children learn (Abbott, 2014). In this study I will use the term 'learning environment' to describe the physical areas where children learn and develop through play. These areas will include indoor and outdoor environments. The 'indoor learning environment' in the context of this study will refer to indoor play spaces (usually classrooms) where children learn and play. The 'outdoor learning environment' in this study includes outdoor play spaces where children learn and play. I will now address the meaning of the term *play* in this study. There will be no single definition to describe play due to its vast nature and varied interpretations (Brock et al., 2013; Moyles, 2012). In saying that there will be no single definition I am not stating that play will not be described, only that it will not be constricted to a single explanation.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This study made use of a qualitative research approach to interview five preschool teachers from three preschools within a "real world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001: 39). Data was collected from preschool teachers by interacting with them (Denscombe, 2007). Preschool teachers' natural settings in this case were learning environments (indoor and outdoor play spaces) where children play. To collect data I followed the requirements as set out by Creswell (2014) where I relied on the views of the participants; asked broad, general questions; and collected data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants. I described and analyzed these words to formulate themes. The inquiry for research was conducted in an objective, unbiased manner.

I employed a multiple case study research design in this study. The cases were explanatory case studies and I did not have any control as to how and what the participants responded to interview questions (Yin, 2009) as they gave their own ideas and opinions with regard to learning through play. Making use of multiple explanatory case study research helped me to put together a good description and a clear picture of what different preschool teachers experience when teaching in the same or different preschool settings.

1.7.2   RESEARCH CONTEXT

By making use of a qualitative research paradigm I focused on preschool teachers' active construction of meanings and situations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) during play. An interpretive perspective suited this study as I studied preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play from their point of view (Niewenhuis, 2007).

1.7.3   SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The sampling procedure helped to improve the quality of the data collected (Schwandt, 2007). In this research study purposeful sampling (Niewenhuis, 2007) assisted in establishing criteria leading to the determining of participants. Specific criteria (Patton, 2001) were set out for preschools as well as preschool teachers (see section 3.5).

Initially six preschool teachers from three different preschools teaching children aged 3-5 years participated in this study, but one teacher withdrew from the study. Thus five preschool teachers from three preschools in Pretoria, teaching children aged 3-5 years, were sampled.

1.7.4   DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

After receiving ethical approval from the University of Pretoria in March 2014, I started with the data collection process. I obtained an ethical clearance certificate in 2015 after data was collected and analysed. Initially I thought that I would collect data for about 3-4 months, but in the end data was collected over a period of six months. To help shape the course of the data collection I identified phases (see section 3.6.2). Phase 1 (March – June 2014) required me to approach preschools and preschool teachers and obtain permission from all relevant parties to conduct the research. It also included informing preschool teachers of the approach that would be followed to collect the data. Preschool teachers had to do photovoices and narrative reflections. This was followed by semi-structured interviews. Phase 2 (June – September 2014) included receiving lesson plans from preschool teachers explaining how play is incorporated into their teaching practices as well as conducting additional semi-structured interviews. Phase 3 (July – October 2014) entailed analyzing the data collected.

1.7.5   DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments included the following: documents, semi-structured interviews and journal keeping (field notes). Documents in relation to this research study were personal documents (Olsen, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe) of preschool teachers' photovoices, narrative reflections and lesson plans. Preschool teachers had to take photos of children playing and write reflections on these photos (photovoice and narrative reflections).

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from preschool teachers with regard to their understanding and implementation of learning through play. The interviews

were audio-recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews assisted with eliciting in-depth responses as preschool teachers were led to feel comfortable (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) during interviews and were allowed to pause the recordings at any time they felt necessary.

Journal keeping or field notes were used throughout the data collection process. I made notes of all site visits and relevant conversation I had with the participants. The notes were not only journalistic jottings of my observations, but included my immediate thoughts, questions that arose and realisations I came to while engaged in the research process (Gambold, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe).

1.7.6   DATA ANALYSIS

Organizing and analysing qualitative, flexible and diverse (Akinyoade, 2012) data was an intense process. "The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (Patton, 2001: 242). I had to use data from photovoices, lesson plans, transcriptions and journals (field notes) to identify ideas and expressions from preschool teachers in order to give meaning to the purpose of this study (Schwandt, 2007).

To summarize and analyse the data I firstly made use of a table for implementing case study research (see Table 3.3). This helped me to determine which of the data collected was truly relevant and applicable (Niewenhuis, 2007).

After all the data was summarized and organized, themes and subthemes were identified relating to the significance (Patton, 2001) of how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play.

1.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical measures were constantly applied to avoid harming any of the participants (Flick, 2009). I ensured that the ethical principles, as stipulated by the University of Pretoria's Ethics committee, were upheld throughout the course of this study. These principles include:

- Voluntary participation (participants were notified of their participation being voluntary via letters and information meetings).

- Informed consent (this was established when all relevant parties signed letters of consent allowing the research to continue).

- Safety in participation (preschool teachers were never put in any harm during this study and the photos they took of children playing were not of a nature where the children or preschool they attended could be identified).

- Privacy (pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the preschool teachers).

- Trust (I did not mislead any of the participants. I believe trust was maintained between me and the participants throughout the course of the research study).

1.9   CHAPTER OUTLINE

Provided below is an outline of this study:

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 provides a framework for this study. The reader is provided with a background to the study, problem statement, rationale, significance and purpose of the study for clarity's sake and to offer perspective on the study. Key concepts are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

In chapter 2 the literature review is discussed. The review of the literature focuses on the specific research questions of this study. It offers an overview of a wide spectrum of literature from South Africa and other countries looking into the history and pedagogy of play, as well as guidelines and factors influencing play.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 consists of the research methodology of this study. It explains why certain research methods and approaches were used to try and answer relevant research questions related to this research study. In this chapter the results of the five cases of preschool teachers' understanding of and implementation of learning through play is presented.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter results and findings of the five cases, describing preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play, are presented.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 presents conclusions and recommendations of the study, which includes final suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER 2
LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I reviewed the literature on the understanding and implementation of learning through play. I will firstly discuss the background of early childhood education and play which paints an interesting picture of where the idea of learning through play originated. Thereafter I will discuss the pedagogy of play in different countries. Then I will discuss guidelines for implementing learning through play. This will be followed by factors influencing the implementation of learning through play. Next, my conceptual framework of implementing learning through play will be explained. Lastly, a conclusion of chapter 2 will be provided.

2.2 BACKGROUND TO HOW CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY

Heywood (2007) argues that even though many powerful ambassadors of play have started taking play seriously nearly a century ago, there are still many who chose to ignore its importance. A historical study by King (1979) concerning children's play reveals that play has often been neglected as a vital part of children's development. In colonial times adults saw children's play as a sign of moral laxity and encouraged children to avoid playing as they were in favour of work and study (King, 1979).

The earliest evidence of the acknowledgement of children learning through play seems to date back to the 1800's with Froebel's (German surname: Fröbel) invented kindergarten. Froebel was inspired by his educator, Pestalozzi, who taught him theories of permissive schooling. He however felt that what he had learned from Pestalozzi did not quite inspire the foundations which needed to be laid in early learning. Froebel created the word "kindergarten", meaning infant garden, in 1840 for a play and activity institute he had established in 1837. A great emphasis was placed on play as well as games, songs, stories and arts and crafts which were thought to stimulate children's imaginations and develop their physical and motor skills (Froebel, 1910).

It is also mentioned that in the 1800's European mothers educated young children outside of their homes. Infant schools were set up in 1844 in America and other countries to care for young children while their parents were working. These schools were usually set up in churches, factories and private homes (Heywood, 2007).

From an African perspective it is clear that cultural influences have impacted and continue to impact how children play and learn. In some African cultures it is expected that children will help with the family's work and contribute where they can in and around the house (James, Jenk & Prout, 1998). In South Africa, preschools have existed for many years, but it is only

after 1994 that the diversity and cultural differences of children have been taken into account (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008). The South African Department of Education ensured continuous development and improvement of the early childhood education system by introducing the White Paper on Education and Training in 1995. This paper focused on introducing a "transformative mission" which aimed at building "a just, equitable, and high quality system for all the citizens … with the national compass set towards the democratic future" (DoE, 1995: 7). The development of Early Childhood Education in South Africa is reflected in the White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (DoE, 2001:5). Both the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995) and the White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (DoE, 2001) reinforces the realization of equal rights with regard to learning and illuminates the importance of Early Childhood Development with the purpose of protecting children's right to develop to their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential (DoE, 2001: 5).

The growth and development of Early Childhood Education resulted in the formation of different theories of teaching and learning. These theories are inspired by the past and are still taught in preschools around the world today (Heywood, 2007). Looking into the background and history of Early Childhood Education inadvertently causes one to also want to look into its future, a future which focuses on the contribution early childhood education makes towards a sustainable society (Pramling Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008). Offering children the ability to learn through play provides them with "basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviours and habits which may be long lasting" (Pramling Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008: 12).

2.3   PEDAGOGY OF PLAY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Studying the pedagogy of play in different countries provided the opportunity to compare other countries' ways of understanding and implementing learning through play to South Africa's. The reason for choosing to compare South Africa to the following specific countries: Norway, Australia, the United Kingdom and China, is because of the embedded nature of the pedagogy relating to learning through play in each of the respective countries' Early Childhood Education curriculums or programmes. The sources used to compile this table (below) consist of policy documents as well as educational journal articles related specifically to pedagogy of play in each of the respective countries.

Table 2.1: Pedagogy of play

	Norway	Australia	United Kingdom	China	South Africa
Early childhood education curriculum/ framework	Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Norway is used to shape and promote children's learning (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013).	The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is used as curriculum for children 0-5 years old (EYLF, 2009).	The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is used as a curriculum for early learning and the development of children 0-5 years old (UKDfE, 2014).	A range of Early Childhood Care and Education programmes are constantly shaped and modified in China (UNICEF, 2012a). China makes use of different curricula due to conflicts between western and Chinese educational ideas and traditions (Zhu, 2010).	In South Africa limited guidelines and developmental standards are provided for the education of young children. There is no official preschool curriculum for children pre-Grade R (DoBE, 2009, UNICEF, 2012b).
Beliefs about play	Play and learning are natural components of children's everyday lives. Play is a practice initiated by children (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).	Play-based pedagogies support freely chosen play as well as teacher-oriented play activities (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2013).	Children develop all necessary skills through play (Langston, 2013).	It is explained that Education policies are child-centred and play-based pedagogy is valued (Lau & Cheng, 2010).	Learning should be child-centred and children should learn through active play and exploration (DoBE, 2009).
Play versus learning (theory versus practice)	School is seen as a place of learning initiated by an adult. Play and learning are separated (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Williams, 2001).	Children often have little opportunity and time to play (Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007).	Learning happens through educational programmes, goals and assessment arrangements (UKDfE, 2014).	Early childhood programmes are academically orientated (Lau & Cheng, 2010). About 50% of children do not attend preschool (Zhu, 2010).	Didactic approaches to learning are sometimes supported. (Excell & Linington, 2008). Parents of children between the ages of 3-5 years decide whether they want their children to attend preschool (DoBE, 2012).
Learning environment	The preschool environment should be joyful, giving children a sense of belonging, leading to communication, play and learning (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006).	Bodily activities and nature are important in Playful Learning Environments (PLE) (Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007).	"Children learn and develop well in enabling environments" (UKDfE, 2014:6).	The environment is structured to promote skills like reading, writing and mathematics. Attempts are made to accelerate young children's learning (Lau & Cheng, 2010).	Enabling learning environments that promote children's full development, including cognitive, emotional, social, physical and moral aspects, are created (DoBE, 2009).

	Norway	Australia	United Kingdom	China	South Africa
Children's learning	Play is a natural childhood activity and play leads to learning. Children should be offered enough time for structured as well as free play (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006).	It is necessary that children know who they are in order to assist them in the process of learning through play (Knaus, 2014).	Children learn in a learning-teaching environment where they are actively developed through cooperative play, thus creating knowledge and understanding (Broadhead, 2006).	Existing pedagogical practices of work-orientated preschool curriculum programs are being challenged to allow more time for children to learn and develop through play (Naftali, 2010).	Children's learning is impacted by their diverse backgrounds. The way in which children learn through play is impacted by their culture and traditions (Ebrahim, 2012). Children should actively learn through play (DoBE, 2009).
Role of the teacher	Relationship building between preschool teachers and adults is important during the child's development and learning through play (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006).	Educators or preschool teachers should be familiar with the EYLF and use this as a tool to help children learn and develop (Knaus, 2014).	Preschool teachers need to have a strong relationship with the children as well as the parents of the children (UKDfE, 2014).	Currently playful learning does not really occur. Preschool teachers need to transform their ways of thinking to allow childhood play and learning (Naftali, 2010).	Facilitative interaction between preschool teachers and children need to take place in order to assist children's learning and development (DoBE, 2009).

2.3.1 EXPLAINING THE PEDAGOGY OF PLAY (TABLE 2.1)

The pedagogy of play was presented in the table above. I will now elaborate on the table, explaining the early childhood curriculum/framework; conviction of play; play versus learning; learning environment; children's learning; and the role of the teacher in each of the five countries: Norway, Australia, the United Kingdom, China and South Africa.

Curriculum policies or frameworks are well structured in Norway (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013). Australia makes use of The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which is a curriculum designed to meet the specific needs of children between the ages of 0-5 years (EYLF, 2009). The United Kingdom has a clearly defined curriculum available: The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) aimed at teaching young children aged 0-5 years (UKDfE, 2014). In China different curricula is used to educate young children (Zhu, 2010). As can be seen from the table above there is no specific curriculum or policy to educate young children in South Africa. Only guidelines and milestones (DoBE, 2009, UNICEF, 2012b) are available in this regard. In South Africa there is a need for structure and clarity with regard to early childhood education curriculum policies or frameworks (DoBE, 2009). In saying this, it is important to acknowledge that South Africa is culturally diverse and in creating specific policies or frameworks for teaching young children, one should be aware of their diversity and not deprive them of their cultural identity (Berry et al., 2013; Ebrahim, 2012).

Looking at the "conviction of play", as phrased in table 2.1 above, of the different countries, many similarities can be identified between Norway, Australia and South Africa. Norway, Australia and South Africa all focus greatly on children's self-directed and self-initiated learning, in other words, activities where children are at the centre of the learning process (Ebrahim, 2012; Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2013; Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). Children's learning through play is pedagogically supported by all of the five countries (EYLF, 2009; UKDfE, 2014; Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013). The question can however be raised whether children are truly learning and developing through play as suggested by the policies and documents.

When looking at "theory versus practice" consistency is observed among the five different countries with regard to the difficulty of merging theory and practice when it comes to learning through play. In all of the different countries it is made clear that when looking at learning through play from a practical point of view, it is not implemented idealistically (Excell & Linington, 2008; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007; Lau & Cheng, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Williams, 2001; UKDfE, 2014).

There is consensus among the countries that the learning environment enables children to play, learn, develop and promote skills. China specifically focuses on the early development of learning more formal skills such as writing (Lau & Cheng, 2010). The other countries, including South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom and Norway, are interested in allowing children to

develop the necessary skills through play (DoBE, 2009; UKDfE, 2014; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006). The learning environment (both indoors and outdoors) is structured to meet different types of play and development exhibited by children (Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006).

Children's learning in all the countries is impacted by curriculum practice and ideas. Active development through both structured and free play (unstructured play) is supported by Norway, Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa (Broadhead, 2006; DoBE, 2009; Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007). In China children's learning is work-orientated and early childhood institutions are being challenged to allow more time for play and learning in their daily programmes (Naftali, 2010).

In Australia and China it seems that the role of the teacher in children's learning is bound by meeting requirements set out by early childhood curriculum policies (Knaus, 2014; Naftali, 2010). Norway, the United Kingdom and South Africa seem to be concerned with the role of the teacher as facilitator, supporting children's learning and building positive relationships with children and their parents (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006; DoBE, 2009; UKDfE, 2014).

South Africa and China are developing countries (in economic terms) whilst the other three countries are developed countries. This however does not mean that South Africa has no sense of pedagogy of play, but rather that challenges of implementing learning through play might be better resolved if we start confronting it by adopting a pedagogy accounting for children's interests, strengths, needs and lived realities (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Ebrahim (2012) argues that although a standardized view of early childhood usually privileges western views, global thinking on childhood makes salient the fact that all children have similar needs. One has to respect children's needs and keep local perspectives, activities and practices in mind. Care should be taken to move away from western assumptions of what is the correct (Berry et al., 2013) way of understanding children with regard to their context and culture. Children's needs, context and culture should be addressed by adopting a flexible pedagogy of play (Gauntlett & Thomsen, 2013). A possible conclusion can be made that learning through play is a universal concept. The challenges facing teachers with regard to how and why children develop through play is also of universal concern (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

2.4   GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Offering teachers guidelines towards the implementation of learning through play might provide clarity on why children should learn through play and how learning through play should take place. Possible guidelines for teachers on how to use knowledge, how to assist in children's play, how to apply play as well as how to plan activities and play spaces are explained below.

2.4.1   ASSISTING CHILDREN'S PLAY AND HELPING THEM TO DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Bodrova and Leong (2007: 4) suggest that preschool teachers use the following to help children develop knowledge and skills through play:

- Play plans (Preschool children plan and monitor their development by drawing a plan. This can be a plan for a game they want to play. They then have to act out the plan and see what needs to be modified, changed or rectified).

- Learning plans (Preschool children and their teachers set learning goals which need to be achieved. It is placed in a box and children can tick off goals that have been achieved and think of new goals they want to reach).

- The freeze game (With this activity children exercise self-regulation. Children dance to music and are shown a picture of a stick figure in a specific position. When the music stops they have to mirror the position as illustrated in the picture).

The ideas provided by Bodrova and Leong (2007) are a starting point to use as guidelines for teaching young children to learn through play. It is also important to consider the role of the teacher to encourage children's play by offering ample opportunities for children to play with objects as well as with other children (Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010). During this process, where children are engaging with objects and people, active learning and knowledge construction takes place which leads to meaningful discoveries, because how you are learning is as important as what you are learning (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Ochiogu, 2013). When children are actively learning and constructing knowledge, they become independent decision makers by using play as a tool to build on past experiences, explore new possibilities and create meaning from these experiences (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005).

Play is fundamental to young children's learning. Supporting children to learn actively means that preschool teachers should try to see play from a child's point of view. Children should be engaged in a playful learning environment where they are challenged with appropriate playful learning material (McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley, 2011).

Focusing on how children develop through play in a diverse society like South Africa means that preschool teachers need to become aware of the role they play in children's lives and how children construct meaning of play through adult guidance (Ebrahim, 2011). Teachers may sometimes be involved in children's play and fulfil a role of "facilitative interaction that involves listening carefully … as well as taking responsibility for provoking experimentation and problem solving …" (Chaillé, 2008: 4). Learning should be a mediated process between learners and the teacher and children should be given time and space to engage with their own ideas through play. The process where children's learning and development are guided by teachers through facilitation and mediation is referred to by Thomas, Warren and De Vries

(2011: 70) as "guided participation". The emphasis is placed on the active role that teachers play during children's engagement with play.

The statement made by Thomas, Warren and De Vries (2011) is not new or unfamiliar. Vygotsky's theory on the importance of facilitative interaction between the child and teacher demonstrated that the teacher may be able to help the child/learner to bridge the gap between what they know and what they do not know and he described this area as the child's "Zone of Proximal Development" or "ZPD" (Vygotsky, 1978: 87). Moyles (2012), a well known author of many books on the subject of children's play, have also made it clear that teacher involvement in children's play should be well executed by stating that teachers could encourage children to make choices, put their choice into effect and then reflect on why there were things that did not work out. In addition, Early, Kelly, Maxwell, Burchinal, Bender, Ebanks, Henry, Iriondo-Perez, Mashburn, Pianta, Alva, Bryant, Cai, Clifford, Griffin, Howes, Jeon, Peisner-Feinberg and Vandergrift (2007) and McInnes et al. (2011) mention the importance of adult guidance in order to help children reach their full potential through problem solving.

It is not only the relationship between the child and teacher which should be considered as important in children's play, but also that of the child with their peers. The child's cognitive as well as social abilities improve and develop while interacting with others (Lipscomb, Swanson & West, 2004). To assist children with social development during play, teachers should encourage the learner to interact with others and involve them in their play, leading the child to control and express their emotions and teaching them negotiating techniques to resolve problems by taking turns, cooperating and sharing (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000; Thomas, Warren & De Vries, 2011). Teachers may build on children's play through suggestions. When the child is, for example, playing that he/she is having a birthday party, the teacher can involve other children in the role-play by suggesting that they help organise the party or attend the party. By involving children in a fun way a teacher could empower children who are usually shy to socialise with others (Early et al., 2007; Koralek, 2004).

In assisting children during play, teachers are not only supporting them to construct knowledge and develop social skills, but children's communication and language abilities might also improve (Koralek, 2004; McInnes et al., 2011). Ashiabi (2007) found that children not only acquire language by observing adults, but they learn to negotiate, argue and practice language skills in relaxed, playful social relations.

Frobose (2008) made the following suggestions on how to assist children in playing:

- *Interact* - The richest play takes place when the adult takes an active role and plays alongside the child, instead of simply providing toys or supervision.

- *Observe* - Watch the child closely to determine skill level and favourite activities.

- *Follow* - Join in at the child's level. Let the child be in control and determine the direction of the play.

- *Be creative* - Rediscover the child within yourself. Set aside restricting adult norms. Use toys creatively.

- *Have fun* - Playing should be fun for everyone, not frustrating. Do not use the time to test or stretch the child's skills beyond capabilities.

- *Children are thinkers* - Teachers can pose age-appropriate problems and challenges to children to help them think of as many different solutions as possible. It is important to know the child well in order to match problems to the child's abilities and interests.

- *Consider age and ability level* - Play activities should fit the child. They should be a bit difficult, but not so difficult as to overwhelm or frustrate the child. Not all children, even at the same age, think at the same level and not all children have the same interests.

2.4.2 APPLYING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY AND HELPING TO DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Play is not only beneficial for children's construction of knowledge and development of social skills and language abilities as mentioned above. Other benefits include children's physical development, stimulation of creativity and improving of emotional security (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Rogers (2013) argue that preschool teachers' understanding of play lies in their realization of the importance of play as pedagogy. In addition, Cheng and Stimpson (2004) and Little, Wyver and Gibson (2011) note that with sufficient knowledge, based on proper training, preschool teachers might have a clearer understanding of play. Teachers' understanding regarding the use of play in preschools varies greatly, but the understanding of teachers' pedagogical thinking about play as an object of learning is important, because this emphasises the theoretical and practical bases for learning (McInnes et al., 2011).

Lipscomb, Swanson and West (2004) and Rogers (2013) believe that children learn through play by being independent decision makers. They also believe that play is a tool children use to build on past experiences, represent their experiences in different ways as well as explore new possibilities and create meaning from them. Broadhead (2006: 191) defines play as follows: "Some have argued play is children's work, but I would say that it is far more important than this. Play is their self-actualisation, a holistic exploration of who and what they are and know and of who and what they might become". In addition Nicolopoulou et al. (2009) have stated that all children should learn through play. Play is a self-directed and flexible experience which serves the needs of the individual child and also prepares them for the future society in which they will live as adults (Brock et al., 2013). Children invest time and energy in play, there are opportunities for learning during play and children need to learn through play (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013).

Trying to understand what play is and why it is beneficial might equip teachers with the necessary knowledge on how to apply play in the classroom. Knowing why children play, provides clarity about what activities and strategies needs to be used to enhance play (Brock et al., 2013; Nicolopoulou et al., 2009). Applying a Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) to learning through play could be regarded as essential as it is a practice that is child-centred and age-appropriate (Papatheodorou, 2003). This practice is "based on what is known about how children develop, taking account of age, social situation and emotional well-being" (Brock et al, 2013: 281). According to McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin and Sun (2005) and Walsh et al. (2010) the DAP is underwritten by a pedagogical influence where:

- Emphasis is placed on interactional relationships between children and adults, operated in reciprocity with one another.

- Encouragement of play-based, first hand, exploratory experiences is provided.

- Provision is made for children to self-manage and self-direct their learning.

- Collaborative, peer group learning takes place.

- The role of the teacher is to facilitate and support learning.

- Early disciplinary and prescriptive methods of instruction are discouraged.

- Children use a variety of artistic media in ways of their choosing.

- Teachers stimulate children's natural curiosity and interest.

- The classroom environment encourages children to listen to and read stories, dictate stories and engage in dramatic play.

- Teachers use activities like block building and measuring ingredients for cooking to help children learn concepts about math, science and social studies.

- Children have daily opportunities to use pegboards, puzzles, lego blocks etc. as they choose.

- The sound of the environment is neither harsh, nor too quiet.

- The sound of the environment is marked by pleasant conversation, laughter and excitement due to playful experiences.

- Children are physically active in the classroom.

- Teachers may prepare playful learning experiences for children where they choose what activities to do.

- Children are presented with concrete, three dimensional learning activities, related to their daily life-experiences.

These pedagogical influences as mentioned by Walsh et al. (2010) seems to provide a summary or definition of what learning through play should be, but it is important to remember that there are many definitions of play and playing. Any one definition cannot encompass all views, perceptions and expectations of play (Moyles, 2012). There is no agreed universal definition for play (Brock et al., 2013) and understanding learning through play is not to define what it means, but rather to acknowledge the importance thereof (Andiema, Kemboi & M'mbonne, 2013; Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Learning through play should lead the child to actively engage in holistic exploration to develop "cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential" (DoE, 2001: 9).

Acknowledging the importance of play in the child's holistic development, challenges teachers to ensure that children are provided with support and facilitation. With regard to how teachers can apply learning through play the following guidelines might be helpful to consider (Brock et al., 2013; Koralek, 2004; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013):

- Focus on the process of play. Ask exploratory questions to help extend the child's play.

- Elaborate on children's play or interests. Make comments, offer new and varied materials.

- Do not try to over-stimulate children, but rather provide self-directed activities that regulate children's interest levels.

- Reflect on children's emotions during their playful actions.

- Playground-type exercise should occur regularly with equipment such as swings, monkey bars and ladders to support the physical training of muscles and build strength.

- Endurance type exercises such as running, rope skipping and galloping are of importance.

- Children should engage in physical exercise often to help improve academic performance.

- Children's inherent motivation to play should be harnessed to promote learning.

- For each concept, idea or learning goal teachers hope children will achieve, they need to ask themselves how it can be promoted through a playful experience.

To enforce valuable and positive learning experiences for children, preschool teachers have to plan, engage and interact with children. Preschool teachers should enforce early learning education policies and reflect on its effectiveness. Teacher practices should be professional and include observing children's play, designing and resourcing physical environments – indoors and outdoors-, as well as evaluating the usefulness of the play experiences provided for the children (Kernan, 2007; Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

2.4.3 PLANNING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Canning (2010: 93) states: "Children's play is influenced by their environment". The environment in which children learn by means of play consists of both indoor and outdoor spaces (Rogers, 2013; Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010). A playful learning environment should be an environment where children's creativity is stimulated and knowledge co-creation, as well as learning, takes place by means of playful and physical hands-on activities (Kangas, 2010). It is advised by Andiema, Kemboi and M'mbonne (2013) that preschool teachers should use play time optimally to structure playful activities for children and be careful to not to use that time for personal administration (work related, teacher responsibilities).

2.4.3.1 Planning the indoor learning environment

Applying learning through play and assisting children's play requires teachers to plan a playful learning environment that invites young children to explore, examine, question, predict, test, investigate, trial, error, and manipulate (Brooker, Blaise & Edwards, 2014). Planning an exciting learning environment will nurture children's innate desire to learn (Koralek, 2004).

Providing a stimulating environment that promotes practical activities and interesting resources (Brock et al., 2013) may lead teachers to question what materials they need to use to structure the indoor learning environment for optimal play experiences. Learning materials that are used to promote children's play and learning should be inviting, interesting and respondent to children's whimsical nature. Using materials that are not usually found at home (finger paints, dress-up clothes), real-life toys (like kitchen utensils) and open-ended materials (like wooden blocks and play dough) encourages exploration through play (Frobose, 2008; Koralek, 2004).

In order to encourage learning through play preschool teachers could not only consider types of materials needed for the learning environment, but also activities that children can engage in. Beaty (1996: 283) mentions that: "if you want something wonderful to happen with the children in your classroom, then you must make wonderful plans". Making wonderful plans requires teachers to realize that children should experience learning through play by including both formal and informal teaching methods. Formal teaching methods are "the planned programme of objectives, content, learning experiences, resources and assessment offered by a school". Informal teaching methods can be seen as areas of the learning program "that are not necessarily directly taught but which are learned … taught by the school not necessarily in formal lessons" (Brock et al., 2013: 77).

When teachers do lesson planning, they should consider how the learning environment has to be constructed and allow for a classroom climate that communicates high but reasonable expectations for children to prosper. Lessons should be organised with specific goals in mind (Almon, 2004; Brooker, Blaise & Edwards, 2014). After lessons have been taught teachers should consider reflecting on whether they have made use of playful teaching, determining

what learning has taken place and whether goals were reached (Frost, Wotham & Reifel, 2008; Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2006). Accommodating lesson planning, which includes formal and informal instruction and is supported by "planned and unplanned activities" (DoBE, 2009: 14), requires the determination of goals which need to be reached through playful and well-planned structured and sequenced tasks and activities as well as time which should be allowed for children to play without the interference of adults (Papatheodorou, 2003). Moyles (2012) claims that preschool teachers should at times create a rich-learning environment and allow learners to explore without interference. She also acknowledges however that there are times when learning takes place because of teacher interference. The author asserts that structured play by means of adult involvement may require the teacher to organise activities supported by structured materials which encourages children to take part.

2.4.3.2 Planning the outdoor learning environment

Fjortoft (2004) did a study on the impact of playing in a natural environment on children's motor development. The study found that children who played in a natural playground (structured by natural landscape elements and natural obstacle courses) showed better balance and co-ordination than children who played in a traditional playground (flat, barren and equipped with climbing bars, swings, sandpits, seesaws and slides). A similar study done by Parsons (2011) revealed that natural playscapes help to offer sensory stimulation.

A process described as "greening" (Parsons, 2011: ii) can be used to integrate natural elements and constructed playscapes in order to ensure maximal play and development. McInnes et al. (2011) argue that the benefits of different outdoor learning environments should be considered. A learning environment with smooth surfaces for example enables cycling and running whereas sheltered environments (with many trees or constructed shelters) can offer children peacefulness.

Many preschools are equipped with traditional playgrounds, but a stimulating learning environment can be created by keeping in mind the play equipment that is popular among children. Equipment including swings, roundabouts or spinning tops and any equipment offering the experience of climbing seemed popular among children, according to Sargisson and McLean (2013). Sargisson and McLean (2013) shed some light on why some equipment is frequently avoided by children in their study on children's play preferences. They found that the reason why some equipment might be avoided is because of the amount of sun exposure. Children frequently find some equipment, like slides, monkey bars and equipment made of steel, too hot to play on.

As a result of this the teacher should keep in mind what time of the day the children are to play outside. Planning specific goals to be reached for motor development can allow the teacher to adequately use outdoor equipment (Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008). As an example the

teacher can have children play on the monkey bars in the morning when the sun has not yet heated it too much.

2.4.4 ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY

Planning children's learning means having knowledge on different types of play. The first type of play discussed is risky play. Brussoni, Olsen, Pike and Sleet (2012) revealed that risky play (motivated play to maximally experiment and explore the environment) provides children with positive emotions and exposes children to stimuli they might previously have feared. In addition Little, Wyver and Gibson (2011) and Little, Sandsetter and Wyver (2012) state that children should take part in risky play in order to assist with natural development. It is not always the case that teachers support children to take risks during outdoor play, because of their own beliefs regarding the subject. Preschool teachers may feel that children's risky play is dangerous and therefore keep them from participating in this type of play. Little, Wyver and Gibson (2011); Brussoni et al. (2012) argue that preschool teachers should provide children with opportunities where challenges, the testing of limits and exploration of boundaries are encouraged during risky play. Preschools should realize that risky play is beneficial to children's development and that they fulfil an important role in helping children overcome fears during this type of play (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011).

In their study on learning through play Smith and Pellegrini (2013) explained that different types of play influence children's learning and development in various ways. Locomotor play includes exercise play like running, climbing etc. Smith and Pellegrini (2013) provided evidence that playground-type breaks where children make use of locomotor play improve their concentration. Another type of play called sensory play, including sand and water play, allows children to learn by discovering and exploring (Broadhead, 2006; Van Heerden, 2012). In a study done by Clements (2004) it is suggested that children enjoy sensory experiences when playing with dirt, water, sand and mud. Object play refers to the "playful use of objects" (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013: 2) and assists in the development of problem solving skills. Object play can also refer to constructive play which reflects children's instinctive, creative building nature (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009).

Social play usually integrates other types of play including object or constructive play and pretend play (Bodrova, 2008; Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009). Pretend play assists in the development of language ability, negotiation skills and improves emotional security (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Gmitrova, Podhajecká and Gmitrov (2009) elaborate on the benefits of pretend play by stating that it is through pretend play that children engage many developmental areas of the brain. A positive relation is observed between cognitive and affective behaviour during child-directed pretend play.

Children's play *without* rules can take the form of pretend play and dramatic play for example. Playing games *with rules* can include activities which are directed by the teacher. These activities are based on challenging mental activity, for example building puzzles. It can also include motional plays where the teacher wants children to develop specific physical skills. Similar, to increase developmental areas of the brain, it is important to have knowledge of children's most favoured play and to implement it into educational processes (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009).

Children's choices, opinions and ideas surely influence their play and believing in the pedagogy of listening with intent, curiosity, sensitivity, interpretation, giving meaning and understanding rather than trying to produce answers (Merewether & Fleet, 2014) might lead the teacher to better understand children's engagement in their own play and play types.

Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) discussed play according to different ideas and suggest that preschool teachers use these ideas to identify children's play and play types. These ideas include play as learning, play as fun versus play as hard work, naturally produced play, play as serious business, rules of/for play and playing fair. It is argued that children need to take part in different types of play and that preschool teachers should know the different types of play as well as the educational value each type of play has to offer young children (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Little, Sandsetter & Wyver, 2012; Merewether & Fleet, 2014).

2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Guidelines for implementing learning through play have been discussed above. I will now discuss each of the following factors that influence the implementation of learning through play: preschool teachers' acknowledgement of learning through play; preschool teacher education programmes; the lack of a curriculum and guidance pre-Grade R; preschool teachers' reminiscences and current experiences with play; playful learning environments; competent teachers; working conditions; demands set for teaching; children's engagement in play and play preferences; gender differences; and technology, media and the social environment.

2.5.1 PRESCHOOL TEACHERS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play is important in children's lives, because play is the best way for children to learn (Ebrahim, 2014; Elkind, 2007; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2008). It has been recorded that when children do not play, as is happening more and more often, they can become depressed or show other signs of illness (Almon, 2004). Learning through play might be implemented better if teachers attach more meaning to the value of play as "the meaning and value of play is embedded in one's knowledge about play, past experiences with play, and values regarding play" (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000: 2). The importance of play is stressed by philosophers,

psychologists and educationalists like Pestalozzi, Wilderspin, Froebel, Isaacs, McMillan, Vygotsky, and Piaget. These influential contributors have shaped ideas regarding learning through play by claiming that play leads to exploration, discovery, development and learning (Brock et al., 2013).

Even though the importance of children learning though play is stressed, there seems to be many teachers who follow an academic, teacher-directed approach toward educating young children (Lau & Cheng, 2010) where teachers are at the centre of the learning process. Teachers may not understand how children develop by learning through play (Lau & Cheng, 2010) and this may be due to a lack of training in this regard.

2.5.2   PRESCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Botha (2012) states that the quality of teacher education programmes in South Africa are of concern. Teachers' knowledge or understanding about learning through play might be influenced by their teacher education or lack thereof. Formal education in South Africa is categorised according to the three bands of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) from the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA). These include General Education and Training (NQF level 1), Further Education and training (NQF level 2-4) and Higher Education and Training (NQF level 5-10) (SAQA, 2014). NQF level 1 includes the obtaining of Grade 9. NQF level 2 includes obtaining Grade 10 and national (vocational) certificates on level 2. NQF level 3 includes obtaining Grade 11 and national (vocational) certificates on level 3. NQF level 4 is awarded when Grade 12 is passed (National Senior Certificate) or national (vocational) certificates on level 4 is obtained. NQF level 5 indicates that a higher certificate or advanced national (vocational) certificate is obtained. To obtain NQF level 6 qualification a diploma or advanced certificate is required. NQF level 7 consist of obtaining a bachelor's degree or advanced diploma. To obtain NQF level 8 one needs an honour's degree, post graduate diploma or professional qualification. NQF level 9 is the obtaining of a master's degree and NQF level 10 refers to obtaining a doctor's degree.

The dilemma of preschool teachers' possible insufficient training on learning through play causes the effect of a lack of knowledge and understanding of play and its meaning (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004). Preschool teacher's tertiary education or preparation should provide them with appropriate knowledge and skills to educate children to learn through play (Berry et al., 2013). Teachers who did not receive proper training on what learning through play entails will find it hard to understand how it should be implemented (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004, Zhu, 2010).

A study done by Zhu (2010) on curriculum implementation challenges revealed that in many instances teacher education focuses on student teachers' construction of knowledge. This may lead to problematic implementation of the preschool curriculum and play pedagogy. This is similar to a study done by Van der Aalsvoort, Prakke, König and Goorhuis (2010). They

found that the way in which student preschool teachers are trained and taught at university does not solely impact learning opportunities presented to children. Preschool teachers who offer children playful learning opportunities do so based on knowledge and experience, interpreting the daily routine to continuously foster playful learning and development (Van der Aalsvoort et al., 2010).

2.5.3   THE LACK OF A CURRICULUM AND GUIDANCE PRE-GRADE R

In South Africa there is currently no preschool curriculum for children pre-Grade R (children aged 3-5 years old) and this causes preschool teachers to feel confused (UNICEF, 2012b). Due to the lack of a preschool curriculum, there is also a lack of guidance for preschool teachers to implement learning through play (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

In a study done by Early et al. (2007) it is advised that preschool curricula should accommodate early childhood learning programmes, providing guidance and support to preschool teachers on how children should learn and develop. As previously stated, there is no such curriculum currently available in South Africa. It is advised by the Basic Department of Education (DoBE) in South Africa that preschool teachers make use of The National Early Learning and Developing Standards (NELDS) document as a basic guideline to educate young children (DoBE, 2009). However this document only provides basic developmental standards. This document is not a curriculum statement and does not provide proper guidelines to inform preschool teachers on how to educate 3-5 year old children (Ebrahim, 2014).

2.5.4   PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' REMINISCENCES AND CURRENT EXPERIENCES OF PLAY

It is a possibility that if teachers are encouraged to think back to the fun times they had as children when they were playing and bubbling with joy and creativity, the blockages causing play to be avoided can be cleared away and a creative playful spirit can flow (Almon, 2004).

Sandberg and Samuelsson (2003) did a study on how teachers' own childhood experiences of play influence their current teaching practices. In this study preschool teachers recalled that they had more time for play when they were children without interruptions and restrictions caused by having to start new activities. Teachers felt that adults (teachers, parents, caregivers, etc.) have caused the reduced playtime for children. Preschool teachers in this study believed the media (television, computer games, social media and magazines) influences children's play and could cause them to play violently.

A study done by Horsley and Penn (2014) revealed that preschool teachers' memories and experiences with play impact their understanding of play and how they teach children through play. Horsley and Penn (2014) and Sandberg and Samuelsson (2003) have tried to address the issue of how to allow children more time and opportunity to play by offering some

suggestions. These suggestions include providing a learning environment that is optimally organised for play. As an example, teachers can postpone tidy-up time by reading, doing art activities, music and movement or eating snacks outside and letting children continue their play after the interval in order to build on learning experiences which have taken place previously.

2.5.5   PLAYFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment should provide children with play materials and equipment and children should receive adequate demonstration in the functioning of learning materials and equipment (Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Brooker, Blaise & Edwards, 2014). While conducting of a case study Canning (2010) found that sometimes simply changing the position of play equipment may make it more dynamic and flexible for children to use. In order for this to be realized, the learning environment should be structured in a playful way by providing children with appropriate play materials and equipment (Canning, 2010; Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

Even though children should be provided with an adequate playful learning environment with "access to as many resources as possible" (UNICEF, 2006: 2), there may be schools that cannot provide children with this idealistic environment as these resources (or materials and equipment) may be too expensive for some preschools to buy, because of financial shortcomings (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011). In a study done by Andiema, Kemboi and M'mbonne (2013) it was found that many playgrounds do not provide children with adequate space or material to play with.

Having fewer learning materials and even inadequate indoor or outdoor space available should not leave teachers feeling completely discouraged as the relationship they have with the children in the play space influences the process of productive play taking place (Canning, 2010). Children's play will be positively impacted in a learning environment where developmental outcomes of play activities are set (Guddemi, Fite & Selva, 2013).

Supporting learning in a playful learning environment requires teachers to ensure that the environment is safe, secure, inviting and emotionally validating. Teachers' own beliefs and thinking influence the way in which they structure a playful learning environment, because their thinking leads to action (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Synodi, 2010). Moyles (2012) believe that teachers' involvement in children's play is of crucial importance. Not only do teachers play an important role in encouraging children's play, but they also need to understand that by creating a rich learning environment which incorporates learning through play, they are helping children to become individual decision makers and take responsibility for their own learning (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011; Walsh & Petty, 2007).

2.5.6   COMPETENT TEACHERS

To be able to make playful activities available in any given space and to set up an adequate learning environment requires teachers to be competent and creative. The way in which the teacher intervenes is a crucial factor in the quality of learning experienced by the child (Synodi, 2010). The teacher as a knowledgeable person will follow a teaching practice which fosters equality, utilizing every opportunity to understand how children learn through play and promoting "children's self-esteem, confidence, independence and imagination" through play (Walsh & Petty, 2007: 203). Teachers who believe that children can learn through play will allow each child to have equal learning opportunities. In the process of offering equal learning opportunities the competent teacher will encourage learning and understanding during play and in doing so promote "courage, trust, perseverance, confidence and responsibility" (Excell & Linington, 2008: 57). The competent teacher further believes in the co-creation of knowledge where children are part of the learning process and not mere receivers of information (Excell & Linington, 2008).

In order for teachers to be competent, they need to act reflectively in their teaching practice to ensure that learning through play is taking place as children learn from teachers' actions and words (Excell & Linington, 2008). By acting reflectively in their teaching practices, teachers may find new playful ways to enhance children's learning by focusing on eliminating frustrations, disillusions, and feelings of failure experienced by children during learning (Walsh & Petty, 2007).

Unfavourable circumstances at home, for example "poor housing infrastructure, lack of access to adequate water, sanitation facilities and poor hygiene contributing to infections and disease" (Berry et al., 2013: 26), could impact the way children play and this may create barriers to learning. Children who have unfavourable circumstances at home could possibly portray exhaustion and can be unmotivated to learn. Teachers' sufficient knowledge and competency can assist them in identifying children who have unfavourable conditions at home. After identifying conditions causing obstruction to children's learning through play, preschool teachers can address the parents of these children. Parents should be informed of any obstructions to children's learning due to unfavourable conditions at home (Berry et al., 2013).

2.5.7   WORKING CONDITIONS

A wide variety of working conditions and circumstances may cause preschool teachers to be unable to implement learning through play. Having a reasonable number of children in their care creates positive working conditions. The DoE (2005: 38) states that "[t]here has been much discussion regarding the 'ideal' learner: teacher ratio". Currently, South Africa's learner: teacher ratio is an average of between 35 and 40 learners per teacher" and also acknowledges that "without adequate numbers of high quality, motivated teachers, it is impossible to achieve access to high quality education" (DoE, 2005: 6). Excell and Linington

(2008) elaborate on the necessity of an adequate number of teachers and explain that teacher shortages may lead to overcrowded classrooms.

The implementation of playful teaching and learning may be greatly impacted by teachers' personal experiences of being overworked. Preschool teachers who have to work long hours with little rest or vacation are physically drained and unable to effectively teach children to learn through play (Excell & Linington, 2008; Sumsion, 2003).

Over time preschool teachers might experience negativity, due to personal differences with co-workers, not being rewarded or respected for the work they do, etc., which may obscure their commitment towards child-centred learning through play. Flottman, McKernan and Tayler (2011) mention that preschool teachers have a need for departmental, professional and parental support. Preschool teachers are sometimes faced with working conditions in which they are offered little support to implement learning through play. This may cause them to eventually leave the teaching profession as they feel that their passion and enjoyment of teaching does not outweigh the prevailing negativity (Flottman, McKernan & Tayler, 2011; Sumsion, 2003).

2.5.8   DEMANDS SET FOR TEACHING

The implementation of learning through play is not only influenced by teachers' personal experiences and teaching practices, but also by the demands set by stakeholders, including headmasters, parents and preschool teachers (Priestley & Sime, 2005). Parents can play a great role in influencing the way children learn in preschools. They may have different notions of how children should learn and may believe that quality learning experiences are determined by immediate learning outcomes (Walsh & Petty, 2007). Quality is usually an objective or subjective entity, but when approaching the concept of quality from a pedagogical perspective, a relation between an object and subject develops. From this perspective one investigates the relation between how preschool teachers interact with the educational program as well as with the children in the classroom (Taguma, Litjens & Mokowiecki, 2013). To help reach demands for teaching quality learning experiences according to Van Heerden (2012) as well as Walsh and Petty (2007) the following is important:

- *Motivation* – Children are interested in and inquisitive about their learning and show active signs of wanting to learn. Children are less motivated to learn when daily learning programmes are structured with formal schooling activities.

- *Good communication skills* – Communication between teachers, children and parents is essential to quality learning.

- *Concentration* – Children are actively engaged in the learning process and not easily distracted. Movement and perception activities help to enhance children's concentration levels.

- *Confidence* – Children feel secure and not under pressure in their learning environment and have confidence in their ability as learners. Children who feel safe and loved by their teachers will demonstrate high levels of confidence.

- *Independence* – Children have a degree of control over their own learning and behaviour.

- *Physical well-being* – Children are happy, well behaved, appropriately nourished and physically at ease in their learning environment.

- *Holistic development* – Children are provided with a holistic learning experience, covering a variety of skills and knowledge within an appropriate context.

- *High-order thinking skills* – Children are given the opportunity to reflect and synthesise about their whole learning experience as well as develop memory and listening skills. Children who play in fantasy and block play areas develop creative thinking skills. Playing in areas where children can discover mathematics and numeracy is equally important.

- *Social interaction* – Children are encouraged to learn in the company of others and to get along with one another and with adults.

- *Respect and values* – Children display a tolerance and respect for themselves, others and their environment. It is important for children to have discipline, rules and regulations in their learning centres.

When integrating the quality learning experiences, from a pedagogical perspective, interactive learning takes place between the child, teacher and learning environment (Van Heerden, 2012; Walsh et al., 2010). Teachers may willingly or unwillingly follow instructional procedures, which might not reflect interactive learning, but is prescribed by stakeholders (Odom, Fleming, Diamond, Lieber, Hanson, Butera, Horn, Palmer, Marquis, 2010). Some of these prescribed instructional procedures may include didactic teaching approaches that focus mainly on the improvement of academic knowledge. It means that children are only recipients of knowledge and they do not discover and experiment on their own. This approach is in contrast to the principle of learning through play which requires children's participation (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004; Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Headmasters or heads of departments may however feel obliged to enforce academic learning in preschools, because of parents' demands and lack of understanding regarding the benefits and importance of play (Walsh et al., 2010). Teachers may be in conflict when following set procedures for instruction and delivery of content and this may influence how they implement learning through play in their classrooms (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2006).

2.5.9   CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PLAY AND PLAY PREFERENCES

Having looked at many different factors influencing learning through play, it is also important to consider that children themselves will have a great impact on how they play and learn. Children's engagement in play can be dependent on their motivation and desire for playful experiences as well as abilities for risk-taking during play (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011). Howard (2002) did a study on 111 children aged between 3-6 years using the Activity Apperception Story Procedure (AASP). This procedure requires children to sort activities as either play/work or learning/not learning by means of visual stimuli. The study identified benefits of considering children's engagement, perspectives and perceptions of play. It was revealed that children's perspectives of play could influence how play is presented in a range of classroom situations

According to Bulotsky-Shrearer and Fantuzzo (2011) children's ability to learn through play can further be impacted by behavioural problems. Children with behavioural problems, including social relational problems, will have quite different play experiences when compared to other children. Children may also have their own opinions and ideas which influence the way in which they play (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Children's opinions and ideas lead them to be active participants in their own lives.

2.5.10   GENDER DIFFERENCES

Children's play preferences are influenced by their gender differences (Fromberg & Bergen, 2015). In a study done by Gmitrova, Podhajecká and Gmitrov (2009) investigating play in mixed-aged and gendered classes, it was found that girls preferred pretend play while boys favoured constructive play. They also found that the type of preferred pretend play is influenced by the family environment of young children. Becky (2010) argues that adults and children have a certain stigma toward the construction of gender. According to her girls are generally observed as being more selfless, mature and facilitating while boys are perceived as silly, selfish and demanding. Boys and girls differ, not only in how they are perceived, but also in the preference of the games they play and the toys they select to play with. Fromberg and Bergen (2015) note that boys tend to play rough, pretend to be superhero's during dramatic play, like to play with blocks and especially enjoy adventurous play. Girls, however, usually like to play in smaller groups and show an interest in a wide variety of toys and play materials including constructive play.

2.5.11   TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

According to Kolucki and Lemish (2011) children's lives and the way they play are influenced by different types of media like books, magazines, television, radio, cinema, computers, the internet and mobile phones. They are convinced that the media can have both a positive and negative impact on children's lives. Electronic media such as video games, television, iPads,

etc. play a dominant role in children's lives nowadays. Smith, Troutt, Lawrence and Thorn (2011) investigated what impact this type of electronic media, especially video games, have when it is regularly used by for children. They found that it has a tremendous social impact on the individual child and affects society as a whole. Media companies gain financial success and this in turn is tied to the formation of society. They argue that the social environment and social structure are influenced in ways that "suppress individual thought" (Smith et al., 2011: 5).

On the other hand there is the idea that while living in a modern world, children ought to be influenced by technology and all it has to offer. The influence of "technology-based play", as referred to by Fromberg and Bergen (2015: 537), does not suppress children's play, but offers a different type of play. With an increase in awareness of internet accessibility and understanding virtual reality, parents and teachers are left wondering if technology has a positive or negative impact on children's learning. It is argued however that one should not stare yourself blind at what or with which instrument children are playing, but rather be interested in children's learning processes during their engagement in technological play (Fromberg and Bergen, 2015).

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework, according to Maxwell (2013), is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, believes and theories that shapes your research. The function of a conceptual framework is to help the researcher to assess and refine their goals (Maxwell, 2013). With regard to my research study the conceptual framework will portray learning through play by looking at it through different lenses. Information from the literature study was used to construct this conceptual framework. I will now give a visual overview (Figure 2.1) of the conceptual framework and a description thereof will follow.
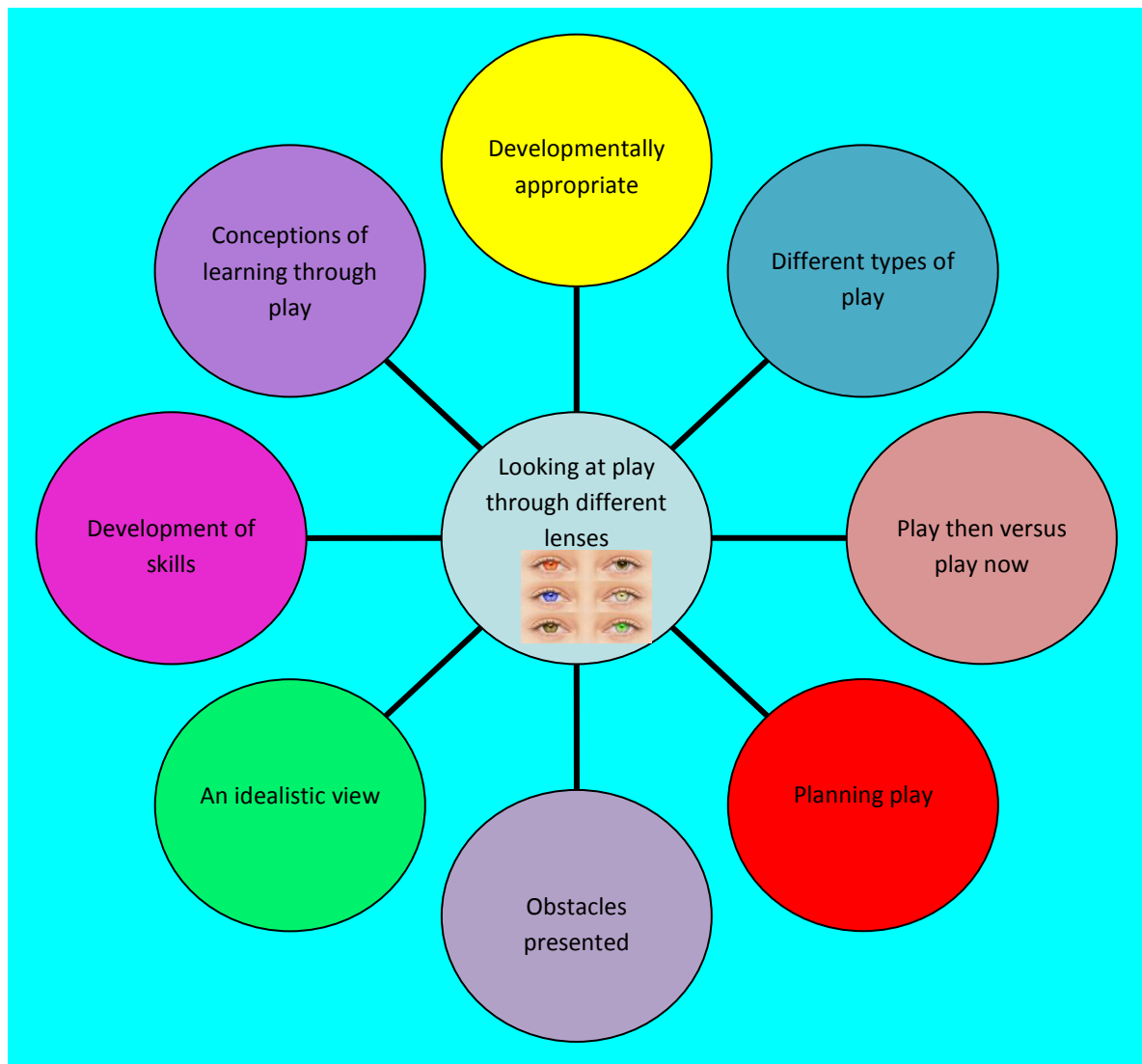
Figure 2.1: Visual overview of the conceptual framework

2.6.1   DISCUSSING PLAY THROUGH DIFFERENT LENSES

I will now provide a description of each of the lenses as derived from the literature study.

❖ **Looking at play through a developmentally appropriate lens**

When studying what developmentally appropriate means, a good indication can be given by looking into Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). This is a practice that originated in the United States of America (McMullen et al., 2005). This practice supports learning through play as it encourages children to be taught through play-based, first hand experiences (Walsh et al., 2010). This practice focuses on what is known about how children learn and develop through play, taking into account their age, social situation and emotional well-being (Brock et al., 2013). The transferability of DAP in different countries have been studied widely (McMullen et al., 2005). Focusing on how DAP can be applied in South Africa is something I think preschool teachers will be able to relate to.

❖ **Looking at play through a lens of different types of play**

Different types of play include risky play, loco motor play, sensory play, playing with objects/constructive play, social play and pretend play (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009; Little, Sandsetter & Wyver, 2012; Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011). Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) describe different types of play by referring to it as ideas regarding play. These are as follow:

- *Play as learning*

    Children learn in an environment that encourages playful activities. Play can be seen as an equivalent to learning as it contributes to children's growth and development. Teachers should acknowledge the importance of play as a central part of children's learning and incorporate play in their daily programmes (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008).

- *Play as fun versus play as hard work*

    Fun is contingent with individuals finding themselves in different positions. Purpose is normally associated with work, while play is seen as less serious. When teachers see their role in children's play as being a director, rather than an instructor, they can plan the learning environment, facilitate activities and allow for the necessary time and space (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010) which provides a fair balance for work and play.

- *Naturally produced play*

    Children's behaviour is naturally playful and curious. During this natural process of play they develop the skills needed for life. The teacher can provide guidance and make children aware of learning experiences gained during their naturally playful experiences (Ebrahim, 2011; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Thomas, Warren & De Vries, 2011).

- *Play as serious business*

    There should be purpose, intent and expectations when preschool teachers think about children's learning. Teachers should ask themselves: "What do children learn from this activity?" when considering activities like art (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010: 49). Play should be a "site where risk, imagination and departures from real life are permitted" (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010: 51).

- *Rules of/for play*

    Preschool teachers sometimes set up rules for play which they feel the need to protect children (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011). These rules might, for instance, prohibit children from playing with guns, because teachers might think it promotes violence and aggression. In fact, banning these types of games runs the risk of denying children powerful learning opportunities. Effective early childhood teachers

go against the norm of setting too many rules for play. These teachers are willing to take risks (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

- *Playing fair*

    Sometimes, especially during free play, children will position themselves as powerful at the expense of others. This can be due to gender, race, social status, language ability or other factors. To help avoid this problem, teachers can address bias and unfairness that occur during play. Children need to be taught how to play fair and why it is important that they do (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

❖ **Looking at play through a lens of play then versus play now**

This lens specifically looks into preschool teachers' memories of their own playful experiences as young children and comparing the nature of play in the past to that of play today (Almon, 2004; Horsley & Penn, 2014).

❖ **Looking at play through a planning lens**

Here specific focus is placed on how teachers plan the learning environment (indoors and outdoors). This lens enlarges the importance of teachers having significant impact on the type of learning environment and play opportunities in which children will engage (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011). This lens also looks into teachers' written planning of learning through play.

❖ **Looking at play through a lens of obstacles presented**

Barriers in regard to learning through play can be better understood by looking into some factors that influence the implementation of learning through play. They are as follow:

- *Teachers acknowledging the importance of learning through play*

    Learning through play might be implemented better if teachers attach more meaning to the value of play as "the meaning and value of play are embedded in one's knowledge about play, past experiences with play, and values regarding play" (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000: 16).

- *Teacher education programmes*

    Teachers should receive proper training on what learning through play entails in order to educate children to learn through play (Botha, 2012; Cheng & Stimpson, 2004).

- *Playful learning environment*

    The learning environment should be structured in a playful way by providing children with appropriate play materials and equipment (Frobose, 2008; Brooker, Blaise & Edwards, 2014).

- *Competent teachers*

  The way in which the teacher intervenes is a crucial factor in the quality of learning experienced by the child (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2006).

- *Working conditions*

  Excell and Linington (2008) note that it is important to have an adequate number of teachers and explain that teacher shortages may lead to overcrowded classrooms. Teacher shortages may occur due to a lack of professional support, being overworked, personal differences and a loss of motivation (Sumsion, 2003).

- *Demands set for teaching*

  Teachers may possibly follow instructional procedures, which might not reflect interactive learning, but are prescribed by stakeholders (Odom et al., 2010). Some of these prescribed instructional procedures may include didactic teaching methods focusing mainly on the improvement of academic knowledge and treating children as recipients of knowledge (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004; Merewether & Fleet, 2014).

- *Children's engagement in play and play preferences*

  Children's engagement in play can be dependent on their motivation and desire for play experiences as well as abilities for risk-taking during play (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011).

- *Gender differences*

  Children's play may be influenced by their gender. The type of games and toys children play with are often determined by gender (Becky, 2010; Fromberg & Bergen, 2015).

- *Technology, media and the social environment*

  The way in which children play is impacted by technology, media and the social environment (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

❖ **Looking at play through an idealistic lens**

Here preschool teachers' own ideas and conceptions of how learning through play could be idealistically implemented in South Africa will be reviewed.

❖ **Looking at play through a lens of skill development**

The lens of skill development looks at the various skills that are developed through learning through play. Children learn to solve problems, enhance creativity and develop leadership skills through play (Frobose, 2008). Play leads to social development (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000; Thomas, Warren & De Vries, 2011) and assists children with socialisation (Koralek, 2004). Communication and language skills are developed through play and assist with negotiation, planning and explanation of concepts and ideas (Ashiabi, 2007; Bodorova &

Leong, 2007; Koralek, 2004). Not only is children's physical development improved through play, but their emotional security is also enhanced (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Play prepares children for the future society in which they will live as adults (Brock et al., 2013).

❖ **Looking at play through a lens of conceptions**

Viewing play through this lens will clarify preschool teacher's different conceptions regarding learning through play. These conceptions will include their understanding, convictions, beliefs and experiences regarding play. Trying to understand what play is and why it is beneficial might equip teachers with the knowledge on how to apply play in the classroom. Children learn through play by being independent decision makers. It is a tool children use to build on past experiences. Through play they represent their experiences in different ways, as well as explore new possibilities and create meaning from those experiences (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005).

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have studied literature on teacher's understanding and implementation of learning through play. Looking into the background of early childhood education and play meant describing the history and origin of the idea of children learning through play. A table (Table 2.1) was presented to explain the summarized pedagogy of play in different countries. In this regard it was clear that a consensus was reached on the importance of children learning and developing through play. Reviewing guidelines and factors which influence the implementation of learning through play illuminated the diverse and complex nature of trying to understand play and how it should be implemented. A conceptual framework was presented to look at play through different lenses. This conceptual framework assisted in the collection and analyses of the data. In the next chapter the research methodology which was used to collect and analyse the data will be discussed.

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CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will discuss the research approach and design that was used to collect and analyse data. Firstly, a description of the research approach will be given, followed by the research design. The sampling procedure will be discussed next. Lastly, an explanation of the data collection instruments, including semi-structured interviews, journal keeping and the use of documents, will be given.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

In this study I made use of a qualitative research approach, which employs a naturalistic approach: seeking to understand phenomena, in this case preschool teachers, in context-specific settings within a "real world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001: 39). It is common for this approach to be used to study people or systems by interacting with the participants and observing them in their natural environments while focusing on meanings and interpretations (Yin, 2011) imparted by the participants. In this study, I investigated preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. Natural environments included the indoor and outdoor play spaces in which preschool teachers educate young children.

In qualitative research it is important that comparisons between the relevant literature and captured data are made (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I investigated preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play and compared their responses to the relevant literature. Creswell and Garrett (2008) describe qualitative research as educational research in which the researcher has specific requirements and/or obligations while collecting data. In table 3.1, I explain the relevancy of having met the requirements and/or obligations during the process of data collection.

Table 3.1: Data collection

Requirement and/or obligation	Relation to my study
The researcher relies on the views of the participants.	In my study I asked preschool teachers to do a photovoice, thus taking pictures to represent their views on how children learn through play.
The researcher asks broad, general questions.	While conducting the semi-structured interviews 1 and 2 pre-determined, broad and general questions were used.
Data is collected consisting largely of words (or text) from participants.	Journal keeping was done and field notes were made during all visits with participants. Photovoices done by participants were accompanied by narrative reflections. Semi-structured interviews were transcribed after

Requirement and/or obligation	Relation to my study
	audio-recordings.
The researcher ==describes and analyzes words== for ==themes==.	==Themes== were established by ==describing and analyzing words== collected through field notes, narrative reflections and semi-structured interviews.
The inquiry for research is conducted in an ==objective==, unbiased manner.	I did ==not get personally involved== with participants and maintained a ==professional relationship==, focusing on the goal of the research study. I remained ==unbiased== to all participants and collected data from them.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1   TYPES OF CASE STUDY METHODS

I have explained above that I used a qualitative research approach in my study. I will now discuss different case study methods, explain what type of case study method I used for my research study and why this method was chosen. Yin (2009) describes case study methods as being either exploratory, explanatory or descriptive. It is explained by this author that when the main research question of a study contains the word "what" in it, and a case study research design is to be used, it will be an exploratory case study method. An explanatory case study method will be used when the main research question contains the words "how" and "why". A descriptive case study method is focused and detailed. This case study method is used when the researcher knows a great deal about the phenomenon (Tobin, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe).

In relation to my research study, the main research question contains the word "how" and therefore an explanatory case study method was used. Yin (2014) mentions that one needs to make sure that a case study research method is best suited to your study by comparing it to other research methods. It is described by this author that there are different research methods which could be used when research questions contain the words: "how" and "why". When studying other research methods such as history and experiment methods, it is clear that an explanatory case study research method fits my study best. I did not use history methods which deal with the "dead past", nor did I manipulate "behaviour directly, precisely and systemically". I examined contemporary events, without manipulation. Interviews of persons involved in the events were held (Yin, 2014). This all pointed towards and confirmed that case study research fit my study best.

3.3.2   MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES

A case study can include single or multiple case studies (Yin, 2014). My research study employed multiple case studies. I had little control over preschool teachers' perceptions and actions regarding the implementation of learning through play and studied them in a real-life context (Jaeger, 1997; Yin, 2009). Preschool teachers' real-life contexts were also their natural

environments, including the indoor and outdoor play spaces where children are educated (this was also discussed in the previous chapter). I made use of an explanatory case study method to study five preschool teachers. Preschool teachers from three different preschools, situated in the city of Pretoria, were sampled (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). The reason for making use of an explanatory multiple case study research method, using the cases of five preschool teachers, was to provide a good description and a clear picture of what different preschool teachers experience when teaching in the same or different preschool settings. In addition Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 182) state that case studies strive to portray "what it is like" in their particular situations.

The case study research method, in combination with data collection instruments, namely: semi-structured interviews, field notes (personal journal entries) and documents (Denscombe, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989) will provide information on the phenomenon of interest: preschool teachers and how they understand and implement learning through play.

While using explanatory multiple case study research, it was my responsibility to foresee the limitations of this approach. Limitations could exist if I did not follow systemic procedures, allow equivocal evidence or biased opinions to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions and in essence neglect to be rigorous in the implementation of this approach (Yin, 2009). I am also aware that the cases selected in my study do not represent the entire population (Niewenhuis, 2007) of preschool teachers. The purpose of my study was not to generalise findings and conclusions, but to acquire insight into how the specific preschool teachers in my study understand and implement learning through play.

3.4   RESEARCH CONTEXT

Niewenhuis (2007: 47-48) argues that a paradigm is "a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects ... reality (ontology) and epistemology as well as methodologies". A qualitative research paradigm, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), focuses on humans' active construction of meanings in situations. Meanings which arise from social situations are handled by means of interpretive processes. The purpose of my study was to gain insight into preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play and I used an interpretivist perspective in this regard. Interpretive studies, according to Niewenhuis (2007), attempt to understand phenomenon being studied by analysing meanings generated from the participants being studied. In my study I used an interpretive paradigm where meanings were generated from preschool teachers by gaining knowledge on how they understand and implement learning through play.

Since I used an interpretivist paradigm, I attempted to understand the phenomenon of interest through the eyes of the participants (Niewenhuis, 2007). This paradigm required me, as the researcher, to meet specific demands when questions were asked during semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I will now explain how I employed an interpretivist

paradigm linked to ideas as proposed by Denzin & Lincoln (2011) as well as Niewenhuis (2007) when questions were asked during the semi-structured interviews.

- Experiences and interpretations of people and their interaction with the social environment need to be understood.
  - o To address this aspect I conducted individual semi-structured interviews and created an opportunity for them to share their understandings and experiences of play.

- The human mind is the source of meaning.
  - o In the literature review the broad nature of play was revealed. This provided me with a holistic view of play and assisted me to better understand challenges which participants face with play.

- Knowledge of the social world affects human behaviour. When reality is better understood, one's conceptual framework can be enriched and a link can be established between the real world and an abstract theory.
  - o I met my participants face to face and had discussions with them. This helped me to gain a deeper understanding of their social world which affects their behaviour. I was also able to link my conceptual framework with the issue under investigation, supporting the establishment of the link between the real world (participants' responses and interpretations) and an abstract theory (based on the conceptual framework, influenced by the literature).

- Our social world cannot independently exist without our human knowledge. Prior knowledge, values, beliefs and intuition affect our conception of reality.
  - o My own experience as preschool teacher and observations of diversity in the implementation of learning through play in different preschools provided me with the motivation to conduct an investigation on how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play.

3.5   SAMPLING PROCEDURE

According to Creswell (2014) sampling is a very important part of the research study and the quality of data gathered depends on it. Succeeding in gathering quality data, requires gaining an in depth understanding of the phenomenon one is interested in and choosing your participants well. Niewenhuis (2007) points out that sampling is a process where you select a portion of the population for your study. This is also referred to as purposive sampling (Niewenhuis, 2007). Purposive or purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2001), was used to select preschools as well as preschool teachers to participate in the study. Initially six preschool teachers from different preschools were invited to participate in the study. One

participant withdrew from the study. By using purposeful sampling, participants were selected according to specific, relevant criteria (Patton, 2001: 46). The following sampling criteria were used:

3.5.1 SAMPLING CRITERIA FOR PRESCHOOLS

- The preschool is situated in the city of Pretoria.

- There is an availability of both indoor and outdoor play space at the school.

- The preschool claims in its school policy, vision or mission statement that they follow a teaching program based on learning through play.

- The preschool has qualified preschool teachers (teachers who have obtained a certificate, diploma or degree in Early Childhood Education).

3.5.2 SAMPLING CRITERIA FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

- Teachers need to be qualified (obtained a certificate, diploma or degree in Early Childhood Education).

- Preschool teachers have to currently teach children 3-5 years old.

- Preschool teachers have to incorporate play in their daily program.

- Preschool teachers selected need to indicate that they want to participate voluntarily.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

To ensure that the data was collected within a relevant time frame and to keep record of the activities in which I as researcher as well as the participants engaged in, a table was set up as follow:

3.6.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROCESS

Table 3.2: Research process table

Time frame	Role of the researcher	Role of the participant
Phase 1: March - May 2014	• Approach headmasters/owners of preschools with permission letters (Appendix A). • Organize information meetings with headmasters/owners and preschool teachers to explain my research study and the role they play in it. • Invite preschool teachers to take part in the study (Appendix B). • Do journal keeping (make field notes) while visiting preschools (see section 3.7.3.).	• Attend information meetings. • Agree to participate (completely non-compulsory). • See section 3.7.1.1.

Time frame	Role of the researcher	Role of the participant
	• Explain to participants what is expected of them when doing a photovoice and narrative reflection (see section 3.7.1.1). • Visit preschools, contact preschool teachers regularly.	• Send researcher photos and photovoices when possible. • Provide the researcher with copies of three lesson plans before August 2014.
Phase 2: June - September 2014	• Conduct first semi-structured interviews with teachers during June 2014 (see section 3.7.2.). • Conduct second semi-structured interview with teachers, using lesson plans and pictures of the pedagogy of play in different countries as reference (see sections 3.7.1.2 and 3.7.2.). • Do journal keeping before, during and after semi-structured interviews with teachers (see section 3.7.3.).	• Participate in first semi-structured interview. • Participate in second semi-structured interview. Copies of lesson plans provided earlier helped to structure the interview.
Phase 3: July - October 2014	• Analyse data collected during March – September 2014.	

3.6.1   PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

❖   Phase 1 (March – May 2014)

During this phase I approached three preschools. I firstly made appointments with headmasters or owners of the specific preschools. I explained to them what my research study was about and asked their permission to do research involving preschool teachers from their school.

After I gained their permission, I approached the preschool teachers. I had information meetings with them to discuss and explain the study and the role they were to fulfil in it. One preschool that I had approached withdrew from the research study (it was their privilege and right to do so if they wished). I contacted another preschool who agreed to help me. At that point I had two teachers from each of the three preschools involved in the study.

Preschool teachers were filled in on what I expected from the photovoice approach. I gave them a written explanation of expectations (please see Appendix C). They had to do narrative reflections to explain why they took the photos and what it reflected. I took the preschool teachers' phone numbers and contacted them regularly. I also made regular site visits to offer support and guidance where needed. To explain the process of data collection to parents, information letters were given to them (please see Appendix F).

❖ **Phase 2 (June – September 2014)**

During this phase I arranged meetings with teachers to conduct semi-structured interviews (the first round of the semi-structured interviews) with them. I used a semi-structured interview schedule to ask questions. The questions used were specifically related to the research questions within my study.

I started doing the first interviews with preschool teachers during June and July 2014. All the preschool teachers did not necessarily provide 10 photovoices, but it was evident that the preschool teachers' responses frequently related to the photos they had taken and they could answer the questions confidently because of this. It was during this phase that one preschool teacher withdrew from the study. I then had five preschool teachers from three different preschools participating in my study.

I started doing the second round of the semi-structured interviews with the preschool teachers during the month of August 2014 and it lasted up to September 2014. Another semi-structured interview schedule was used during these interviews. .

❖ **Phase 3 (July – October 2014)**

This phase consisted of analysing of data collected.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Table 3.2 above summarises the data collection process. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I am making use of a case study method. Typical of a case study method is that data will be collected from various sources. These sources of data, also known as data collection instruments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), will include the following in relation to this study: the use of documents; semi-structured interviews; and journal keeping. I will now provide detail on each data collection instrument used in this study.

3.7.1 THE USE OF DOCUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

"Documents can be categorized into three main types: (1) public records or documents, (2) personal documents, and (3) physical materials" (Olsen, 2010: 319 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe). For the purpose of this study, personal documents were used to collect and analyse data. Personal documents included teachers' photovoices and narrative reflection as well as their lesson plans.

3.7.1.1 Photovoice and narrative reflection

Photovoice was developed in China to help Chinese women to photograph their work realities. Photovoice, according to Wang (1999: 190), is: "a method that enables people to define for themselves and others, including policy makers, what is worth remembering and what needs

to be changed". For the purpose of this research study, preschool teachers photographed their work realities by taking pictures of children participating in different playful activities. The goal of using photovoice is to enable teachers to record and reflect the strengths and concerns (Einarsdottir, 2005) they experience with learning through play. Photovoice offers preschool teachers the ability to create positive change, because it is an effective way of communicating with people in positions of power (Carlson, Engebretson & Chamberlain, 2006).

Photovoice enables participants, in this case the preschool teachers, to be involved in the research study (Olivier, Wood & De Lange, 2009). Participants in this particular study were asked to take photos, with their phones or digital cameras, of different play activities. The following guidelines were given to them (also see Appendix C):

- Photos taken should represent the way you plan and teach playful learning activities.

- Both indoor and outdoor play spaces should be evident.

- Different types of activities should be reflected in your photos.

- Also try to take photos that represent ideas regarding play which include: play as fun or hard work, naturally produced play, play as serious business, rules of/for play, and playing fair.

- Pictures should represent different types of materials, including open-ended materials (these may include sandpits, logs, wooden blocks etc.).

- Pictures should also reflect strengths and concerns regarding learning through play.

In conjunction with the photovoices teachers had to write narrative reflections in order to explain, in writing, the pictures they had taken. To assist teachers in doing the narrative reflection, the following guidelines were given:

- Explain how the photos you took represent the way you plan and teach playful learning activities.

- Explain what area was used (indoor or outdoor) and why.

- Describe what type of activity you photographed.

- Give an explanation of which materials you used to plan lessons and why.

- Explain strengths and concerns.

To express the value of using photovoice and narrative reflections to both the researcher and participants I will present an example of one teacher's photo's and narrative reflections below:

Figure 3.1: Pearl's photo collage of children learning through play

The photos above were taken by Pearl. Pearl's narrative reflections provide detail of the photos taken and could even provide a feeling of sharing in the playful moments captured on camera. Pearl describes in her narrative reflections that children develop various skills through play including listening skills, bodily positioning, social skills, language skills, communication skills and mathematic skills. In her narrative reflections she also states that teachers should help to stimulate children's play.

As with Pearl, all the participants' photovoices and narrative reflections give a deeper insight into their way of understanding and implementing learning through play. With the photovoice concept the teachers were able to "control the photographic process in order to express, reflect and communicate their everyday lives" (Wang, 1999: 186).

Data gathered through teachers' photovoices and narrative reflection provided background information to the researcher which assisted in structuring the upcoming semi-structured interviews. Teachers also benefited from doing the photovoices and narrative reflection before the semi-structured interviews, as it related to many semi-structured interview questions and they could comfortably refer back to the photos and narrative reflections they had done.

3.7.1.2 Lesson plans for data collection and analyses

Documents, as a record of human activity, are a valuable source of data in case study research (Olsen, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe). As mentioned earlier, personal documents were collected and analysed for research purposes. The photovoice method in conjunction with narrative reflection has been discussed in terms of personal documents that

were collected from the preschool teachers. The other type of personal documents collected from the teachers was lesson plans. I asked the preschool teachers to provide me with copies of three different lesson plans reflecting learning through play.

The use of the preschool teachers' lesson plans for data collection and analyses led to the collection of interesting data for the study, because "these documents [were] created through ongoing day-to-day activities" (Olsen, 2010: 319 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe). Preschool teachers' lesson plans related to the research, as it was lesson plans reflecting learning takes place through play.

3.7.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The information captured during the semi-structured interviews was collected face to face and was audio-recorded. Information was transferred from audio-recordings to transcriptions. I made use of semi-structured interviews to probe preschool teachers on their knowledge, experiences, perceptions and implementation (Patton, 2001) of learning through play. Semi-structured interviews are used where predetermined research questions (Barlow, 2010) shape interviews. The sequence and wording of the questions during then interviews changed at times to help the researcher probe the participants and clarify answers while keeping the participants focused on the relevant topic (Hancock & Alogozzine, 2006).

By using semi-structured interviews it is not only the research questions or pre-determined questions that are addressed, but also the questions that arise spontaneously as the interview evolves. Semi-structured interviews assist in eliciting in-depth responses where preschool teachers feel comfortable enough to explain in their own way and speak their minds (Patton, 2001) on what their understandings of play are. When conducting interviews with preschool teachers, I engaged in conversations with them and made use of questions, probes, and verbal and nonverbal gestures (Barlow, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe).

Two semi-structured interviews with each of the five participants were done. The first interview focused mainly on preschool teachers' understanding of play. The questions that were used in this interview were inspired by the research questions of my study, my conceptual framework of looking at play through different lenses as well as the photovoices and narrative reflections on learning through play that the teachers had done. The questions that were asked in the first semi-structured interview are as follow (also see Appendix D):

- What comes to mind when you think about learning through play in South Africa?

- Are you aware of any policies or documents released by the South African Department of Education that explain how young children should be educated in South Africa?

- How do you feel about this?

- What kind of impact, if any, do you think learning through play has on children?

- How do you think learning through play could assist children in the development of skills like leadership skills, creative skills, problem solving skills, social skills and so forth?

- Do you know the term Developmentally Appropriate Practice? What do you understand under the term DAP?

- I will now present you with the points of interest relating to learning through play and DAP. Then I would like to ask you what your opinion of each of the following is:

  o What do you think about emphasis being placed on interactional relationships between children and adults?

  o What comes to mind when you think of the encouragement of play-based, first hand, exploratory experiences being provided?

  o What do you think about provision being made for children to self-manage and self-direct their learning?

  o Do you think that collaborative, peer group learning takes place in the age group you teach?

  o What do you think about the role of the teacher being to facilitate and support learning?

  o What comes to mind when you think of early disciplinary and prescriptive methods of instruction being discouraged (meaning do you agree or disagree with a teaching practice that focuses on rigid, disciplinary education)?

  o What comes to mind when you think about the classroom environment encouraging children to listen to and read stories, dictate stories and engage in dramatic play? This question aims to elicit your thoughts on children's creative thinking and play in the classroom.

  o Do you think that teachers should use activities like block building and measuring ingredients for cooking to help children learn concepts about maths and science?

  o What do you think about children having daily opportunities to use pegboards, puzzles, legos, etc. as they choose? With this question I would like to gather your thoughts on children playing with educational toys as indicated and whether you think they should be able to choose when and if they want to play with these toys or not.

  o What comes to mind when you think about the sound of the environment being neither harsh, nor too quiet?

  o The sound of the environment is marked by pleasant conversation, laughter and excitement due to playful experiences. What do you think about this?

- What do you think about children being physically active in the classroom? This question aims to hear your thoughts on whether or not children should play games, requiring them to be physically active in the classroom, or do you think that they should not be physically active in the classroom and why.

- What do you think of children being presented with concrete, three dimensional learning activities, related to their daily life-experiences?

- How did you experience the process of doing the photovoice and narrative reflections?

- Do you think that your photovoice reflects development of skills for example language skills, mathematic skills and social skills?

From August – September 2014 I did the second semi-structured interviews with the preschool teachers. The second semi-structured interviews were also framed around research questions (Barlow, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe) with a specific focus on teachers' lesson plans regarding to learning through play. This is a list of the questions used during the second semi-structured interviews (also see Appendix E):

- Which guidelines or materials do you use to do lesson planning?

- How do you think learning through play is reflected in your lesson plans?

- Which strategies or activities do you use to enhance learning through play?

- How can you assist children during play activities (free play and planned play activities)?

- I do you think about the following ideas regarding play:
  - What comes to mind when you think of play as learning?
  - What do you think about play as fun versus play as hard work? With this question I would like to hear your opinion on children's play and whether it is only for fun, but also when they are busy with activities which they may perceive as "hard work".
  - What comes to mind when you think about children's natural way of playing?
  - What is your opinion of play as serious business (meaning that children play with reason or toward a specific goal)?
  - What do you think about rules of/for play?
  - What is your opinion of playing fair (social interaction)?

- How do you think teachers can help to scaffold children's learning, meaning to build on their learning experiences and construction of thoughts and ideas, through play?

- What memories do you have regarding your own playful experiences as child within a preschool setting?

- Do you think these memories influence the way in which you implement learning through play and if so, in what way?

- Do you have an opinion on how children used to play in the past versus how they play nowadays?

- What is your own personal philosophy (theory, belief or conviction) regarding learning through play and what do you think influenced this?

- Do you think children play a part in their own learning process and if so, how would you include them and show regard for their ideas in their learning process?

- I would like you to elaborate on and give me your opinion of the following:

  o Do you think that teachers' own knowledge or beliefs regarding learning through play influences the implementation thereof and if so, how?

  o How could teacher education programmes impact the implementation of learning through play?

  o What is your opinion of the influence of the learning environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces, and play equipment on learning through play?

  o Do you think all teachers have the same beliefs and knowledge about play?

  o Do you think the learner-teacher ratio could impact learning through play and if so, how?

  o What comes to mind when you think about demands being set by stakeholders like headmasters, parents and preschool teachers regarding children's learning?

- If you had the power to control how children are taught and how learning through play could be implemented in South Africa, what would be your ideal?

3.7.3 JOURNAL KEEPING

Field notes in the form of personal journal keeping were made before, during and after the interviews. Gambold (2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe) states that field notes could be used to describe a physical space, mannerisms of people and the duration of events. I kept this in mind when I made field notes to record information. I started making field notes when I visited preschools and arranged informative meetings with principals and preschool teachers to describe the behaviour and reactions of participants and to provide detail throughout the research process. Field notes were made before, during and after each individual semi-structured interview with participants. Gambold (2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe) has many explanations and guidelines regarding the taking of field notes which I applied to my study. She explains that field notes can be words taken down to refresh one's memory and current additions can be made to earlier notes. Field notes should be written, expanded upon, reviewed, added to and then reviewed again. The notes should be relevant to the research

topic to provide useful data. To expand upon field notes, reflections on other academics' research might connect present research with the research of others. If one is to be in the field for only a few months (as will be the case in my study) field notes should be focused on specific research questions.

As advised by Gambold (2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe), my field notes were not only journalistic jottings of what I saw and experienced, but included my immediate thoughts, questions and realisations I came to while engaged in the research process. Gambold (2010 as cited in Mills, Durpos & Wiebe) also recommends that one should use a lot of time to reflect on field notes, because during reflection and review of one's notes connections can be made to research questions and data captured in the literature study. I made notes by first writing down my recordings, but later I typed them to describe every detail of data collection. By making use of a journal for writing field notes, I was able to gain insight into relationships among case participants (preschool teachers) and communication patterns. Notes made in the research journal were compared for confirmatory or contradictory information (Olsen, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe) that helped illuminate the understanding of learning through play.

3.8   SUMMARIZING AND INTERPRETING INFORMATION

In case study research one has to make sense of information collected from multiple sources and it is a recursive process in which the researcher has to interact with the information throughout the investigative process (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Information captured needs to be simultaneously summarized and interpreted. I used a checklist for implementing case study methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) to help me with summarizing and interpreting the information.

Table 3.3: Checklist for implementing case study methods

Research questions	What information I need	How I will gather the information	Other information
How do preschool teachers experience and understand the implementation of learning through play	I had to gain knowledge of preschool teachers' experiences and understandings of learning through play.	I asked teachers to take photos of children playing and write narrative reflections to describe their understandings of how children learn and play.	It was stipulated in guidelines given to teachers that their own experiences should be portrayed through pictures and narratives.
How do preschool teachers conceptualize and understand learning through play?	Information on teachers' conceptions and understanding of learning through play had to be gathered.	Teacher's conceptions and understanding of learning through play were revealed in photovoices and semi-structured interviews.	I organised the information gathered from the preschool teachers.

Research questions	What information I need	How I will gather the information	Other information
Which guidelines do teachers use when implementing learning through play?	I had to establish which guidelines teachers use to help them implement learning through play.	I asked teachers which guidelines they use during the semi-structured interviews.	Information gathered during interviews was used. I also studied preschool teachers' lesson plans.
Which activities and/or strategies do preschool teachers apply to enhance learning through play?	Activities and/or strategies teachers apply to enhance learning through play should be made clear.	I asked teachers to provide me with copies of their lesson plans. I used these lesson plans to see which activities and strategies they use for play.	Photovoices, narrative reflections and responses during interviews were also meaningful.
Which factors, if any, may influence the implementation of learning through play?	I need to find out if preschool teachers experience that there are factors which influence learning through play.	I presented teachers with factors discussed in the literature and gathered their thoughts and opinions thereof.	Other factors emerged while doing site visits and talking to participants. I made notes of it in my journal and added it to the literature review.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Collecting information, which is called data by researchers, is the beginning of the research process. The important part of the research process is to organize the data and to think about it. Qualitative data analysis should be diverse and flexible (Akinyoade, 2012). Qualitative data analysis essentially generated through qualitative data gathering is concerned with understanding the perspective of the participants (Akinyoade, 2012). This study aimed to gain knowledge into preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. Through qualitative data gathering techniques preschool teachers' attitudes, behaviours, feelings and thoughts were recorded to provide a rich, detailed picture to be built up about why people act in certain ways and what their feelings about these actions are (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

In qualitative data analysis the researcher has to play a fundamental part in the process of analysis (Coffey, 1999, Flick, 2009). To deal with the involvement of the researcher Denscombe (2007) suggests that researchers make an effort to identify how their ideas, attitudes and beliefs might impact the way in which data is presented and findings interpreted. One should guard against this as far as possible (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Another approach in dealing with researcher involvement is to recognise that one's beliefs and values will affect the way in which data is captured and interpreted and to discuss this by means of reflexivity (continuously referring back to the data collected). Reflexivity allows data to not be contradictory, does not exclude data and does not allow improprieties to occur (Akinyoade, 2012; Fontana & Frey, 2000 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln). In this study I made use of

reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis processes, acknowledging that I have certain beliefs and values, and to assist with concerns of researcher involvement by constantly studying the data captured through different data collection strategies.

In qualitative data one has to analyze text and in this study it included narrative reflections of photovoices, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, lesson plans and journal keeping. I have kept in mind that in qualitative research one cannot analyze printed words to give meaning to findings, but rather the evidence, or as previously referred to, the text should provide ideas and thoughts expressed by participants which should be analyzed to give meaning to the purpose of the study (Flick, 2009). "The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (Patton, 2001: 242).

To help make sense of the data collected I organized and summarized the data (Patton, 2001). The checklist for implementing case study research (see Table 3.3) provided me with an initial framework to collect and analyze data that is truly applicable to my study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Constant reflection during data capturing assisted me in the process of analysing data to determine which information collected was of critical importance to the study (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). I made use of the following suggestions from Denscombe (2007):

- Information was organised in a similar format
  - Files were created on the computer with each of the case studies identified by specific pseudonyms.
  - Written copies of narrative reflections were typed into similar word documents and saved under each respective file.
- Each item collected should be given a reference number
  - Photos, as sent by each preschool teacher, were numbered and saved under their respective files.
  - Semi-structured interviews and the transcriptions thereof were also numbered and saved.
  - Field notes were given dates to assist with the logical flow and referencing thereof.
- Keep copies of all original materials
  - I compiled a file with dividers to help with the organising of information. This file has original copies of consent letters, written narrative reflections of preschool teachers, original lesson plans, as well as the vision and mission statements of each respective preschool.

As the research progressed and my understanding of the material collected deepened (Mukherji & Albon, 2010) themes and patterns emerged. Denscombe (2007: 292) referred to this as the "data analysis spiral". The data analysis spiral included organising and summarising the data and led to themes and subthemes (Patton, 2001), relating to the significance of how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play, being identified. This process continued until the point of theoretical saturation (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) when I concluded that the investigation of preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play was represented as well as possible. Some themes and subthemes emerged as I engaged with the participants and critically reflected on the transcriptions of interviews. Other themes and subthemes relate specifically to the literature studied with regard to this study. Data analysed were compared to the literature to find comparisons, contradictions and elaborations on existing literature (Barlow, 2010 as cited in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe).

Themes and subthemes identified offered the opportunity of linking relevant literature with the data collected (Patton, 2001) and findings made. Themes and subthemes are presented by making use of narrative logic (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Narrative logic (Mukherji & Albon, 2010) allowed me to discuss each case study as one would tell a story, where logical flow from one concept to another can be identified.

3.9.1   THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Themes were identified after the data was gathered, read, organized, summarized and critically interpreted as a result of meaningful analysis (Bazeley, 2009). Identified themes assisted in the integrated presentation of the data collected from each case study (Yin, 2014). Below a table will follow presenting the themes and subthemes identified to present preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play.

Table 3.4: Identified themes and subthemes

THEME 1: Personal background about learning through play	Subtheme 1.1: Childhood memories
	Subtheme 1.2: Professional development
THEME 2: Personal understanding and beliefs about learning through play	Subtheme 2.1: The social environment influences children's play
	Subtheme 2.2: Play develops children's cognitive knowledge and skills
	Subtheme 2.3: Play develops children's emotional knowledge and skills
	Subtheme 2.4: Play develops children's physical and motor skills
THEME 3: The role of free play	Subtheme 3.1: Indoor play
	Subtheme 3.2: Outdoor play

THEME 4: Teachers' practice and strategies used to enhance learning through play	Subtheme 4.1: Curriculum
	Subtheme 4.2: The role of the teacher during play activities
	Subtheme 4.3: School context and teacher's play pedagogy

3.9.2 EMERGING OF THEMES

❖ **Theme 1: Personal background about learning through play**

Subtheme: Childhood memories

Subtheme: Professional development

This theme and its subthemes emerged during the first semi-structured interviews with the preschool teachers. The teachers talked about their own experiences of play in their childhoods. This included their experiences at preschools or simply where they played at home or with friends. During the interviews they also talked about how their professional development is influenced by teacher education programmes as well as practical experience gained during their years of teaching young children.

❖ **Theme 2: Personal understanding and beliefs about learning through play**

Subtheme: The social environment influences play

This subtheme surfaced during Pearl and Pauline's first semi-structured interview. These preschool teachers were interviewed at the beginning of the data collection process. They both talked about how modern times have changed how children play and how there is an increase in demand for stimulation. This led me to ask more questions about how children played in the past and how they play now during the second semi-structured interview with the preschool teachers.

Subtheme: Play develops children's cognitive knowledge and skills

Subtheme: Play develops children's emotional knowledge and skills

These subthemes appeared early on in the research process as preschool teachers presented photovoices and narrative reflections of how children develop cognitive and emotional knowledge and skills through play. During the first semi-structured interviews preschool teachers talked a lot about how children develop cognitively and emotionally through play.

Subtheme: Play develops children's physical and motor skills

This theme became evident early on in the research process as demonstrated through the photos the preschool teachers took of the children playing. They described the many physical and motor abilities and skills that are developed while children play.

❖ **Theme 3: The role of free play**

This was a theme that arose during the process of keeping a personal journal or writing down field notes. I noticed that when most preschool teachers talked about learning through play, an association with free play was made.

Subtheme: Indoor play

Subtheme: Outdoor play

I asked preschool teachers to take photos of children playing indoors and outdoors. These subthemes were gathered by studying preschool teachers' photos and narrative reflections as well as data collected from the semi-structured interviews.

❖ **Theme 4: Teacher's practices and strategies to employ learning through play**

This theme was identified when trying to describe each of the preschool teachers' unique way of teaching learning through play as well as describing the strategies they use to enhance learning through play.

Subtheme: Curriculum

Curriculum as a subtheme was identified during the constructing of the semi-structured interview questions.

Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

The surfacing of this subtheme happened both spontaneously and through semi-structured means. Sometimes during interviews preschool teachers talked about the roles teachers play during children's play activities, even when the questions were not even specifically directed towards it.

Subtheme: School context and teacher's play pedagogy

This was an interesting theme that appeared as the data collection process was nearing its end. It seemed like preschool teachers wanted to express their hopes as well as realities faced during the implementation of learning through play. Preschool teachers' school context and play pedagogy was disclosed during the second semi-structured interviews.

3.9.3 DESCRIBING, COMPARING AND RELATING ANALYSED DATA

Identifying themes and subthemes was not the final step of the data analysis process. I made use of a "describe – compare – relate" (Bazeley, 2009: 10) formula to record the results of data analysis. Describing the context of each case study means that the details of each case are given and these details are discussed using an explanatory method (Yin, 2014). In other words, I described each case of each preschool teacher, using narrative logic (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

By comparing different or similar expressions of each case according to specific themes meaningful associations were recorded. Comparing expressions and characteristics across specific integrated themes allows one to record variation and an absence of association (Bazeley, 2009). I used this process of comparing cases with one another. Cases were portrayed holistically according to all the narrative data collected from each of the respective participants.

The process of relating the data to themes meant studying the data and determining conditions for specific themes that would arise (Silverman, 2011). After studying the data again, themes were used effectively to determine results, both results that one expected to find, or did not find (Bazeley, 2009).

3.10   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA COLLECTED

To establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis one needs to efficiently check on the data and ensure that the interpretations are credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (Akinyoade, 2012). Trustworthiness - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability- were addressed as follow:

- To ensure data is credible, or believable, I had prolonged engagement with preschool teachers for a period of five months. The credibility is further increased by ensuring that the data collected projects the participants' perspectives (they took photo's, wrote narrative reflections, provided their lesson plans and answered questions specifically structured to allow them to provide their own opinions and beliefs).

- "Transferability means the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings" (Akinyoade, 2012: 5). This included the description of the research context, research process and its assumptions to see whether the results could be applied to other settings.

- Dependability refers to the ever-changing context within which research occurred and how this affected the approached study. In this study one preschool withdrew from the study early on. I contacted another preschool who agreed to help me. Much later on in the study a participant from another preschool withdrew, because she was unable to provide me with any photo's and although contact was made regularly the data could not be collected from her. The dependability of this study is underpinned by my personal journal in which I dotted down everything that happened during the research process.

- Confirmability means the degree to which others can confirm the data. By collecting data in various ways, including photographs, narrative reflections, tape recordings and transcriptions, confirmability is increased. Contradictions were avoided by checking and re-checking the data throughout the study.

Reliability in case study research can be assessed by applying techniques to address consistency. Consistency has two components: equivalency and internal consistency. Equivalency relates more to quantitative research (Ward & Street, 2010). Internal consistency or validity refers to trustworthiness with regards to qualitative research. Trustworthiness can be addressed by looking for convergence among multiple and different sources of information (Maree, 2007). To establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, triangulation can be used. The reason for its efficacy is that triangulation refers to "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2014: 259). I established trustworthiness through triangulation by using different data collection strategies: documents for data analyses (photovoice, narrative reflections and lesson plans); semi-structured interviews; and journal keeping by means of field notes. In addition, the data was collected from multiple preschool teachers to strengthen the trustworthiness.

3.10.1 CONFIRMING CASE STUDY FINDINGS

It has been said above that it is important that the data collected should be credible and this was addressed by looking at consistency and trustworthiness. To further assist in the credibility of the data Hancock and Algozzine (2006) suggest that the researcher confirm case study findings by:

- Sharing results with those examined in the study – This involved debriefing participants in the study with the goal of gaining feedback. In gaining feedback participants' perceptions of findings were examined.

- Review of the report by fellow case study researchers – In relation to my research study, I asked my supervisor and co-supervisor to review my case study methods.

- Articulation of researcher's personal biases – Acknowledgement of one's biases and explaining how these biases will be addressed to ensure that the research process and findings are not influenced is important. I tried to remain unbiased throughout the research process and tried not to allow personal feelings or opinions to cloud my findings.

- Demonstrate how findings are based on information acquired from multiple sources – I have mentioned above that multiple sources for data collection were used in this study. I have described it as different data collection strategies.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I have applied for ethical clearance at the University of Pretoria's ethics committee and received feedback approval for the data collection process in March 2014. After data was collected and analysed I received an ethical clearance certificate in March 2015. Ethical measures should constantly be applied to avoid harming the participants (Flick, 2009). The

following important principles, as stipulated by the University of Pretoria's ethics committee, was upheld and respected throughout the research study:

- Voluntary participation, implying that participants may withdraw from the research at any given time.

- Informed consent, meaning that participants in the research must at all times be informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.

- Safety in participation. Put differently, the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harmed in any way, e.g. research with young children.

- Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.

- Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be subjected to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

To uphold the principles as set out by the University of Pretoria's ethics committee, I arranged information meetings with the preschool teachers (as discussed in the research process table, 3.2). In these meetings I explained to the participants that they were invited to participate voluntarily and could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. I informed all the preschool teachers of what the research study entailed and what their involvement in the study would be. They were assured that I would consider their own safety by safeguarding their identity. All information they shared with me was treated as private and confidential. Some preschool teachers were colleagues of mine and therefore a relationship of trust had already been formed. I gained the trust of others by respecting and appreciating their willingness to share information with me. Letters to headmasters (see Appendix A); participation letters to preschool teachers (see Appendix B) and letters to parents (see Appendix F) also supported the above mentioned principles.

3.12   CONCLUSION

In Chapter 3 the qualitative, case study approach for collecting data was described. The sampling procedure of using five preschool teachers from three different preschools was explained. Methods describing how data was collected, summarised, organised, and analysed were mentioned. Chapter 4 will consequently provide the research results, presented according to themes and subthemes that emerged during the data collection process.

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CHAPTER 4
RESULTS OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the results of the data collected. The data analysis was steered by the main research question of how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play. The main research question and the sub-questions were addressed by means of specific themes that were identified through the data analysis. These themes were established through studying the relationship between the conceptual framework of this study and the data. Themes and subthemes are presented for each case study (refer to section 3.9.1. for a description of the themes and subthemes). The case studies are written in a narrative style.

Abbreviations were used to explain statements or quotes as collected by means of the data collection instruments. These abbreviations are: Interview 1 (Int. 1); Interview 2 (Int. 2); Narrative Reflections (NR); Field notes (FN); Grade R (5-6 year old children); and Grade RR (4-5 year old children). In this chapter you will see photovoices (photos taken and narrative reflections or descriptions thereof) done by preschool teachers. Each photovoice was given a name and number to simplify and organize the collected data. Due to the nature of this type of data collection, a large amount of photovoices from preschool teachers were collected and all cannot be presented in this chapter. Reference made to photovoices in this chapter will therefore not necessarily be presented chronologically, but each will refer to the naming and numbering system used to organize data.

The results are presented in five case studies with each describing an individual preschool teacher. The preschool teachers' backgrounds regarding learning through play; understanding and beliefs about learning through play; perception about the role of free play; teacher practice; and school context and pedagogy are explained in this chapter.

4.2 DIFFERENT SCHOOL SETTINGS

❖ School 1

School 1 is a public preschool. It receives grants from the government, but there is also a governing body providing funds to the preschool. It has seven classrooms. There are three classrooms accommodating 3-4 year olds and four classrooms accommodating 4-5 year olds. They cater for a maximum of 24 children in a classroom, accompanied by one qualified teacher and a classroom assistant for each class. According to School 1's vision and mission statement children should be informally and playfully educated to assist with transitioning into the next phase of preschool (Grade R, usually 5-6 year olds).

Two participants from this school were chosen to take part in the research study. Pauline teaches 4-5 year old children at School 1. Pearl also teaches at School 1, but she teaches 3-4 year old children.

❖ **School 2**

School 2 is a large private preschool with a lot of classrooms as well as outdoor play spaces. It caters for children aged 0 – Grade R (5-6 year olds). The classrooms are big and can accommodate about 24-28 children per class. Most classes have their own classroom assistants and some classes share classroom assistants. Most preschool teachers are qualified, but there are also students who work full time at the school. School 2's vision and mission statement state that children should receive quality education through playful learning.

Initially there were two participants from School 2 taking part in the research study, but one participant withdrew from the study. The participant who remained is called Katherine and she teaches 4-5 year olds.

❖ **School 3**

School 3 is a private preschool. The school caters for different age groups from 0 – Grade R. Each age group has one class with a qualified teacher as well as a classroom assistant. The classrooms accommodate a maximum of 24 children per class (children aged 3-6). According to School 3's vision and mission statement children should be cared for, taught and uplifted through playful learning.

There are two participants that were chosen from School 3: Heather, who teaches 4-5 year olds, and Hailey, who teaches 3-4 year olds.

4.3 THE CASE OF PAULINE

Getting to know Pauline

Pauline is a driven young teacher who believes in the power of play. Pauline teaches children aged 4-5 years. Pauline graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2012 where she received a Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.). She started working at School 1 in 2012. This is now her third year of being a preschool teacher. In Figure 4.1 (below) Pauline's photos and general thoughts on learning through play is presented.

Figure 4.1: Pauline's photo collage of children learning through play

From Pauline's photos and narrative reflections it is evident that she believes that children need to learn from their daily life experiences. She believes that during play they learn to understand and during this process they are stimulated to further engage, explore and learn.

4.3.1   THEME 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND REGARDING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Pauline's personal background regarding learning through play is explained through her childhood memories and the importance of her teacher education programme.

4.3.1.1   Subtheme: Childhood memories

During the second interview Pauline talked a lot about how she used to play as a child and mentioned that somehow rules for play were not as strict then as it is now. She remembers swinging very high on swings and jumping off without teachers telling her that she was not allowed to do that. She says that today children are not even allowed to stand on a swing and may not swing very high. She feels that we are setting very strict rules for children nowadays and she believes that parents' expectations of how children should play influence how children play nowadays. Parents also place the responsibility for the prevention of injuries during play on teachers and that causes the implementation of strict rules for play at preschools. (FN – 27 August 2014).

4.3.1.2   Subtheme: Professional development

Pauline explains that the knowledge about play she constructed during her professional education programme at university was not sufficient and suitable and that it *"… would be very good for us … at university, if it is better explained how things should be handled in a*

classroom and how children and play come together with hands-on experiences, and how to implement this in the classroom" (Int. 1). Pauline added: *"I feel that we receive too little exposure at university and the focus is placed on other things that are not necessarily age-appropriate"* (Int. 1). She also mentioned that she felt like she was not prepared to fully implement learning through play and did not understand what learning through play truly meant. (FN - 27 August 2014)**.**

4.3.2 THEME 2: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Pauline has strong feelings and beliefs about play and the teacher's role during play as she says "*I don't feel that the teacher should get very involved in children's play and disrupt their play. I do believe that there should be freedom to play a little bit in an unstructured way"* (Int. 1). During the interview and written narratives she often offers examples to demonstrate how valuable play is for young children.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme: The social environment influences children's different types of play

In contrast with her own childhood memories about play, Pauline points out that children's context and social environment have changed *"I think children have forgotten how to play, because of our modern lives … children of today do not know how to play"* (Int. 1). For her, social play acts as an important context in which children acquire social skills and social knowledge. She believes that "*children learn to develop leadership skills through play"* (Int. 1).

4.3.2.2 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills

Figure 4.2: Pauline ~ Photos 1 & 2 – *Seeds*; Photo 4 – *Block play*

In her photovoice she took pictures of how children played with seeds (Photos 1 & 2 – Seeds) and explained in her narrative reflections that in playing with objects like these seeds they learn "*important mathematical skills and develop cognitive thoughts"* (Nr 1). For Pauline, play contributes to children's ability to solve problems. She says that "*to understand is to discover and children learn to solve problems, practically, through play"* (Int. 1). She also feels that block play is valuable to young children's cognitive development. Photo 4 – *Block play* in

Figure 4.2. demonstrates children's acquisition of problem-solving and spatial knowledge through block play. *"Block play, to me, is very good. I have different types of blocks in my class and you can see who can solve a problem while building and who can build big buildings and which children are interested in it. I think it is very good development for children to do block play"* (Int. 1).

4.3.2.3 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills

Pauline believes that play is a tool which can be used to become aware of children's emotional state and well-being as "*play captures the interest of all children and this causes learning to take place*" (Int. 1). She wants children to have a positive emotional connotation with learning and believes this is achieved when children are offered fair opportunities to play. She says that "*children should have fun while playing*" (Int. 2).

4.3.2.4 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills

Figure 4.3: Pauline ~ Photo 5 – *Sandpit*; Photo 10 – *Jungle gym*

Through Pauline's photovoice pictures and interview (Photo 5 – *Sandpit,* Photo 10 – *Jungle gym*) she explains that children "*develop gross and fine motor skills*" (NR, Int. 1) during physical play. She believes that physical play helps children to develop and learn and that children should be *"busy and physically active"* (Int. 1).

4.3.3   THEME 3: THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

Figure 4.4: Pauline ~ Photos 21 & 22 – *Having some fun*

"*Play can be structured or unstructured. Children learn more important lessons through unstructured play. So in my class I don't believe children should be quiet and sit on their chairs without making a noise*" (Int. 1). In Figure 4.4 Pauline demonstrates that she wants children to have fun, especially during free play. She thinks that "*more play should take place in classrooms. There needs to be more freedom during play*" (Int. 2).

4.3.3.1 Subtheme: Indoor play

She talked about different areas where children could play indoors and mentioned that children's activity levels are influenced by what and where they play indoors. Pauline values both indoor and outdoor play. Pauline's photos of indoor play (see Figure 4.5) reflect structured indoor play (where she initiated the learning activity). She however wants children to be at the centre of the learning process and believes that "*hands-on experiences are ... important in the classroom*" (Int. 1).

Figure 4.5: Pauline ~ Photo 13 – *Dimensional construction;* **Photo 17 –** *Baking and making*

4.3.3.2   Subtheme: Outdoor play

According to Pauline play should always be made interesting for children. When thinking about how outdoor play could be made interesting she says that play equipment should be "*manipulated during play... Children love to play with new things that they are not used to rather than playing with things they are allowed to play with everyday*" (Int. 2). Pauline frequently talks about how children's curiosity and interest need to be stimulated during play and in her photovoice (Figure 4.6: Photo 11, Photo 12 – *Treasure hunt)* she demonstrates how this can be done. In the outdoor environment children are used to create a fantasy world of discovering treasure, but the outdoor environment was perceived in a whole new light when the children "*worked together to decipher clues"* (Nr 1).

Figure 4.6: Pauline ~ Photos 11 & 12 – *Treasure hunt*

4.3.4   THEME 4: TEACHER'S PRACTICE (STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY)

Pauline tried to enhance learning through play by *"allowing children to have fun while they play and not be aware of learning taking place"* (Int. 1). She tried to allow play to be part of the children's daily lives. Pauline is able to analyse learning opportunities and make decisions about materials because *"I am absolutely in favour of hands on experiences that allow children to discover and try things on their own"* (Int. 1). She also feels that teachers must guide exploration and play by helping children to become " *aware of their achievements by saying 'look what you just build' or 'put a door there' … This develops their self-esteem and the following day they will find it easier and more enjoyable to do these activities"* (Int. 1).

4.3.4.1   Subtheme: Curriculum

"There is no curriculum for grade RR" (Int. 1). *"We also use the Grade R curriculum and simplify it to find ideas for Grade RR"* (Int. 2). Pauline feels that her teacher education about young children's play according to specific curriculum requirements lacks substance. She mentioned that at university a lot of examples of how children are educated are given, but "*many were from other countries and not from South Africa*" (FN – 25 June 2014).

4.3.4.2   Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

"I think that children should be taught to play sometimes. One can give them ideas on what they could play. Sometimes I will build something with the children" (Int. 2). Pauline believes that teachers' personalities influence the way in which they will present playful learning opportunities for children. Her own opinion is that "*the teacher should not get too involved in children's play and disrupt their play*" (Int. 1). When reading her responses to interview questions relating to the role of the teacher during children's play it seems that she wants children to discover and learn things on their own, with the teacher only being a facilitator and aid. "*So, children learn much better when they themselves experiment... and choose on their own how they will do it and how they will play with it*" (Int. 1).

4.3.4.3   Subtheme: School context and teachers' play pedagogy

Pauline explains that for optimal learning to occur through play children need support, time, and open-ended materials that will stimulate them. She also thinks that: *"… children should be made curious. Children at this age level are extremely curious. When they see something, they want to know how it is done and what you can do with it"* (Int. 1). Pauline mentioned that preschool teachers need to be involved in children's play and at times encourage participation (Int. 1). This was evident through many of Pauline's photos and descriptions. An example is in the photos below (Figure 4.7*)* where the children explore in the sand and develop skills "*without even knowing it*" (Nr 1).

Figure 4.7: Pauline ~ Photos 5 & 6 – *Sand pit*

4.4   THE CASE OF PEARL

Getting to know Pearl

Pearl is a dynamic, spontaneous teacher who uses her years of experience in teaching young children to provide them with interesting and relevant learning experiences. She has a diploma

in teaching and has 27 years of teaching experience with children between the ages of 3-5 years. She is currently teaching 3-4 year old children.

While passing by her classroom unnoticed, one can see that the children are actively engaged in fun and creative playful activities. In Figure 4.8 below, Pearl's photos and general thoughts on learning through play are presented.

Figure 4.8: Pearl's photo collage of children learning through play

Pearl frequently pointed out the importance of children's engagement in their own learning and play and said that "*children learn better in a practical manner*" (Int. 1). In meeting with Pearl and during site visits at the school where Pearl teaches, I noticed how she stimulated children "*with trays of sand and shells placed on tables*" (FN – 8 April 2014). She told me that she was a firm believer of sensory play where children explore using their senses and learn in a practical way (FN – 8 April 2014).

4.4.1   THEME 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND REGARDING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Pearl's background on learning through play is shaped by her own childhood memories and experiences. Her ability to relate to children learning through play is not only confirmed by her own childhood memories, but also by her professional development.

4.4.1.1 Subtheme: Childhood memories

Pearl felt that she was not stimulated enough as a child in the area of learning through play. In saying this, she does however remember having playful memories as a child. She remembers loving to do role play for long periods of time (Int. 2). Pearl recalls often being unsure of what adults meant when they talked or what the meaning of certain words in stories were. It is because of this that she tries to demonstrate things practically. *"I read a story today and in this story there is a spider that can spin lace. The children did not know what lace was and then I showed them different pieces of lace"* (Int. 2) to help solve their confusion. This is not something that was done for her as a child.

4.4.1.2 Subtheme: Professional development

In Pearl's case she feels that practical experience impacts one's professional development greatly and *"[p]ractical application is something that you will remember to do, rather than theory you studied"* (Int. 2). In addition she notes that the way lecturers *"educate students have great impact on them as future teachers"* (Int. 2).

4.4.2 THEME 2: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Pearl believes that teachers' own knowledge and beliefs about play and how children should learn influence the way in which children learn. During Pearl's second semi-structured interview she expressed frustration when saying *"[s]ometimes you send the children home with lovely crowns or whatever, but then the teacher did all the work and the child did almost nothing and learned nothing. I think it is important that children always learn something from what they are busy doing"* (Int. 2). Pearl wishes that play could be used to *"create a calm, stress free, fun environment for children to learn in"* (Int. 2). In Pearl's narrative reflections and interviews she highlights the importance and purpose of planning play.

4.4.2.1 Subtheme: The social environment influences children's different types of play

Here Pearl made an interesting point when saying that when children play one should *"keep… their gender [in mind]"* (Int. 2). She indicated that gender differences in a child's social environment influence how and what they play. She also pointed out that children live in a fast paced world where *"technology and different media also impact children's play"* (Int. 2). She feels many changes have taken place over the past few years and that many more will take place: *"I think it is because of how they grow up and what is familiar to them"* (Int. 2).

4.4.2.2 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills

Figure 4.9: Pearl ~ Photo 9 – *Keeping shop*; Photo 13 – *Drawing freely*

Through Pearl's photovoice and narrative reflections it is evident that she believes that children develop many skills during social play. She describes keeping shop as follows: *"During this process they are learning mathematics, because they have to estimate the value of different products"* (NR, Figure 4.9: Photo 9 – *Keeping shop*). She stated that "*they learn mathematics and test how well they can remember. You can test their memory better when you do it through play... you allow them to be creative"* (Int. 1). She also says that some structured play activities "[*teach] them math and colours. Sometimes we teach them to sort things, things that they might count as well. We use these things in different ways"* (Int. 1). In Figure 4.9 (Photo 13 – *Drawing freely*) Pearl noted how children had to plan what they wanted to draw with the given resources.

4.4.2.3 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills

Pearl feels strongly that children should be allowed the opportunity to be involved in their own learning process and to promote children's self-esteem and ability to do things on their own versus *"being spoon fed"* (Int. 1). She wants children to be allowed the opportunity to develop emotionally through social interaction and believes they are exceptionally enabled during fantasy play, as demonstrated in the photo below (Figure 4.10). In her narrative reflection Pearl described how children had certain responsibilities and roles to fulfil during this fantasy play and that their "*social skills are developed"* (NR) through this kind of play.

Figure 4.10: Pearl ~ Photos 5 & 6 – *Playing house*

4.4.2.4 Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills

Pearl explains in her narrative reflection and through figure 4.11 below, how children develop gross and fine motor skills during play: *"With this game children learn listening skills and positioning of their bodies, for example, 'sit on your chair, stand next to your chair, lie down behind your chair, lie under your chair'"* (NR). Pearl refers to children as "*active beings... you cannot expect them to sit still all the time, because then they will not take in what you are trying to teach them*" (Int. 1). She believes that children should constantly be active and that this is what helps them to learn.

Figure 4.11: Pearl ~ Photos 1 & 2 – *Chair game*

4.4.3 THEME 3: THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

Pearl believes that learning and stimulation should always take place, even during free play, and that one can use the toys children play with to create learning experiences. *"You cannot leave them to do their own thing and you do your own thing"* (Int. 1). In photos she took of children playing, one can see that outdoor play is very evident (see Figure 4.12).

4.4.3.1   Subtheme: Indoor play

She wants children to have fun while playing and loves to create a relaxed mood in the classroom by using music. When she wants to create a calm mood during play she will play calm music or try to quiet the children down. "*Other times I will use music to capture their attention and play the music hard*" (Int. 1).

4.4.3.2   Subtheme: Outdoor play
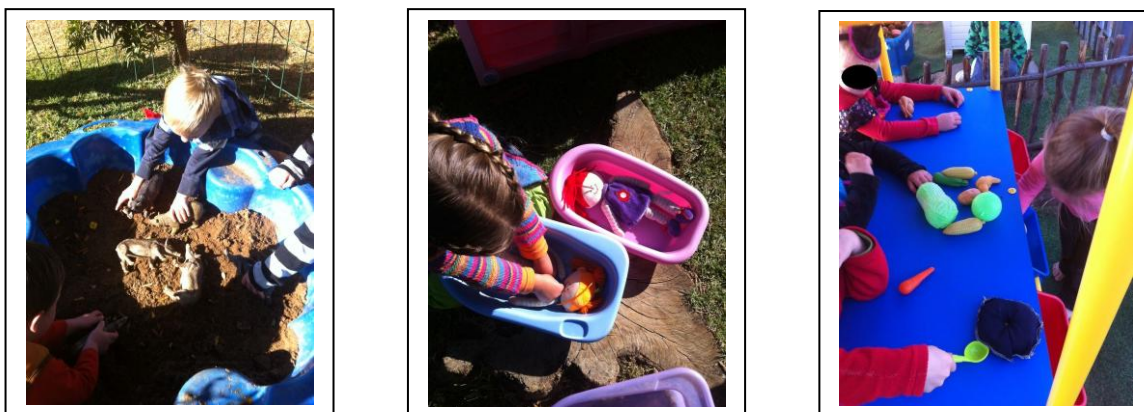
Figure 4.12:   Pearl ~ Photo 4 – *Playing with rhinos*; Photo 8 – *Playing house*; Photo 10 – *Keeping shop*

As mentioned earlier, Pearl's photos reflect a lot of outdoor play (see Figure 4.12. above). In Pearl's response to why children play the way they do nowadays she said that *"[c]hildren grow up with a lot of resources and materials. They need to be stimulated a lot. They need more colourful things than we needed as children"* (Int. 2). This can be seen in her photos. She provides children with many toys or colourful materials to play with outdoors.

4.4.4   THEME 4: TEACHER'S PRACTICE (STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY)

Pearl employs strategies that allow children to be creative and involved in their own learning. She is a creative teacher herself. She demonstrates this in her lesson plans. Role play was used to introduce circles and red items to children in one of the lessons (Lesson 2). She, the teacher, pretends that her cell phone rings and then proceeds to answer. She explains to the class that a package has been delivered at their school. She goes out to fetch the package and inside is items that are red or circles -which is the theme for the week. Pearl further mentions how she uses "play" (Int. 2) as learning method to keep the children interested in learning. She tries to make use of a variety of media, especially real-life objects, or models (Int. 2) of real-life objects, to enhance children's learning by addressing their needs and interests at this age level.

4.4.4.1   Subtheme: Curriculum

Pearl feels that she does not receive curriculum guidance and support to educate 3-4year old children. She would like "*more structure and guidance*" (Int. 1) in this regard.

4.4.4.2   Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

She believes in having a positive teaching practice. *"I believe in a positive attitude as a teacher. Children are very sensitive to negativity and then they behave accordingly"* (Int. 1). Pearl also believes that teachers should be involved in children's learning: "*You stimulate them by asking questions that relate to their daily lives and of things they are familiar with and then you build on what they know*" (Int. 2). She believes that children "*learn faster and remember better*" (Int. 1) through play and that "*you as teacher need to be visible and intervene when needed*" (Int. 2).

4.4.3.3   Subtheme: School context and teachers' play pedagogy

For Pearl the school context is important, because she thinks that *"it would be ideal if teachers did not have too many children to look after. I think it would be nice if you had the right equipment, the necessary knowledge and a positive approach to children's strengths rather than their shortcomings*" (Int. 2). Pearl is idealistic and feels that in her school context play is sometimes misinterpreted. She wishes that play pedagogy could replace "window dressing" (FN – 11 September 2014).

4.5   THE CASE OF HEATHER

Getting to know Heather

Heather has a love for academicism (deeper learning and learning theories) and wants to have a life-long learning experience in order to better educate young children. She is a passionate teacher. She does not want to stagnate and believes in the many benefits of play. Heather did a Bachelor of Primary Education degree (B.Prim.Ed.) and has been teaching since 2002, thus for 12 years. She gained her experience through teaching children between the ages of 0-9 years old. In Figure 4.13 below Heather's photos and general thoughts on learning through play are presented.

Figure 4.13: Heather's photo collage of children learning through play

Heather believes that play is wonderful and "miraculous" (Int. 1) for children. Heather wants teachers to see play through the eyes of children as this could cause them to be able to implement it better in their teaching practice (FN – 8 July 2014).

4.5.1 THEME 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

In a description given by Heather (something she did extra which was not required by the study) she writes about the value of play and references books and articles she read about learning through play. She also references these sources during her interviews. This was interesting about Heather and I, as a researcher, noticed her interest in research and this specific study. Her background about learning through play is also captured in her own childhood memories and professional development.

4.5.1.1 Subtheme: Childhood memories

"My preschool memories were so joyful that I think it inspired me to also become a teacher" (Int. 2). Heather wants children to have the same joyful memories of play that she had as child. She remembers that she was taught everything, even rhymes, through play and wants to do the same for the children she is teaching (Int. 2).

4.5.1.2   Subtheme: Professional development

In Heather's first semi-structured interview she mentions that she has a great love for acquiring new knowledge and that she loved refreshing her knowledge on learning through play by reading up about it a little. In her second semi-structured interview she expresses her desire to improve her knowledge and expertise in the area of teaching young children. This is evident when she remarks that "*[i]t is important that there is an investment made in teachers so that they can attend courses as much as possible*" (Int. 2).

4.5.2   THEME 2: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Heather states that she finds the various ways in which children play across different countries interesting. She also mentioned that each culture group in South Africa has different ways of playing as *"it relates to their traditions and that their culture is captured"* (Int. 1) in their play. Further she believes that teachers "*sometimes ... learn a lot from children*" (Int. 1). Heather believes that children should play as much as possible. *"I feel that everything will just fall into place if it is presented to children in a playful way. They should not be forced to do things. I think children want to learn on their own. It is important to provide them with enough stimulating experiences*" (Int. 2).

4.5.2.1   Subtheme: The social environment influences children's different types of play

An interesting point Heather made was that children in South Africa play differently due to *"differences in culture groups [and] their financial status -this definitely also has an effect*" (Int. 1). In Heather's opinion children's social environment is not only influenced by culture and finances, but technology plays a great part in it too. Heather mentions how children's play reflects what they are used to at home. "*Their natural daily life experiences were reflected in their play, one can now see how it is also reflected in modern times*" (Int. 2). Heather mentioned that children see their parents working on laptops and talking on cell phones. They then mimic their parents in their play (Int. 2).

4.5.2.2   Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills

An integration of the development of skills can be noticed in Heather's photovoice and narrative reflections. In one example (Figure 4.14: Photo 4), she uses play through movement where *"a number is written on a piece of paper and stuck on a block to keep it upright. Children are expected to bounce and catch a ball a certain amount of times as indicated by each number*" (NR). Heather refers to children's natural curiosity as intelligence "*causing them to want to discover and develop*" (Int. 1). In addition she talks about how children develop awareness of depth and height during block building (also see Figure 4.14: Photo 7 – *Indoor block play*). Her ability to link different types of play to children's development of cognitive

knowledge and skills continue as she explains how children's creativity leads to even more discovery and learning (Int. 1).

Figure 4.14: Heather ~ Photo 4 – *Play through movement*; Photo 7 – *Indoor block play*

4.5.2.3   Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills

Heather says that: *"Emotional intelligence… that is now the buzz word. It is so [much] more important than your* IQ. *This cannot develop without enough play"* (Int. 1). Heather explains how play is truly important for children's "*social, emotional and intellectual development*" (Int. 1) and makes remarks about the damage done to children when "*trying to speed up the development of a young child's brain*" (Int. 1). She believes that children build interpersonal relationships during fantasy play and that "*[a] platform is created where children are made aware of other's feelings, desires and rights and realise that as these things are important to themselves it is also important to others*" (NR).

4.5.2.4   Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills

Figure 4.15: Heather ~ Photo 9 – *Outdoor sand play*; Photo 15 – *Drawing pictures in the sand*

Heather believes in the importance of allowing children to develop physically through play. In the photos above she demonstrates the value of sand play and explains that their "*sensory*

abilities ... tactile perception, awareness and exploration" (NR) is developed when playing in the sand. She further explains in her narrative reflections that gross and fine motor skills such as "*using their arm and shoulder muscles, aiming and using good eye-hand coordination... fine motor skills when working with the materials"* (NR) are developed when children play (also see Figure 4.15).

4.5.3   THEME 3: THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

The way in which Heather describes how she can "*jump into children's situations -boots and all-, to see what their household looks like and also to support them"* (Int. 1) demonstrates how she makes use of free play, especially fantasy or dramatic play, to analyse children. She observes children during free play indoors and outdoors. Heather suggests that teachers should keep in mind and think what they want children to learn during indoor or outdoor play. "*The learning environment is a factor that influences how and what children will learn. You have to consider what you want children to do or learn"* (Int. 2).

4.5.3.1   Subtheme: Indoor play

When talking about indoor fantasy play Heather says it "*is an important medium to understand what children experience as it is expressed during their role play"* (NR).

4.5.3.2   Subtheme: Outdoor play

The importance of children playing safely outdoors is of concern to Heather "*in order to allow children to feel safe and secure"* (Int. 2). She wants children to be exposed to play that assists with gross motor development (see Figure 4.13: Heather's photo collage). However she feels that if children are safe and secure when playing outdoors, they will learn and discover more. She said: "*children should know what is expected of them, what they are allowed to play and with what, otherwise they will be insecure and will not be able to play to their full potential* (Int. 2.)

Figure 4.16: Heather ~ Photo 6 – *Gross motor outdoor play*; Photo 16 – *Using outdoor equipment for gross motor development*

4.5.4 THEME 4: TEACHER'S PRACTICE (STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY)

Heather tries to expose children to as many playful situations as possible in order to help them accelerate learning through play (NR). She wishes that teachers could see play through the eyes of children to truly understand its nature and necessity. Heather often mentions that teachers could learn a lot from children by observing how they play (Int. 1, Int. 2). Heather believes that written planning is important in a teacher's practice, but that learning through play "*is not always something that can be noticed by looking at written planning*" (Int. 2). When planning for play she likes "*studying children and finding out what they enjoy. Then I will plan accordingly ... play needs to be fun and should be the peak of the day*" (Int. 2). Heather believes that teachers' own playful experiences as children as well as their personalities will influence how they implement learning through play. Her teacher practice is also reflected in discussing curriculum for learning through play and the role of the teacher during playful activities.

4.5.4.1 Subtheme: Curriculum

Heather is aware of the milestones children need to reach at the age of 4-5 and she often mentions how the CAPS (curriculum for Grade R) is used as reference point for teachers. "*I think it is sad that there is not a CAPS for younger children and you know at each school the same type of stimulation is taking place. I think there is a gap, because all children are not prepared in the same manner for Grade R*" (Int. 1). Heather mentions how preschools "*water down CAPS*" (Int. 1). She has conflicting emotions regarding this, because at one point she says "*I think it would be very good if someone could write a curriculum for the younger children... The positive thing about CAPS is that everyone has the same standard to follow*" (Int. 1) and "*the sad thing is that there is a ceiling. I wish that each and every child, according to their own potential, could be stimulated as best possible without there being a ceiling*" (Int. 1). Heather's use of the word "ceiling" (Int. 1) referred to limits adults set for children's learning and development.

4.5.4.2 Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

It is important to Heather that a teacher should be a facilitator during children's play. In being a facilitator, according to Heather, teachers should engage and intervene in children's play when necessary (Int. 2). By making use of play as a tool to allow children "*to learn more and memorise less*" (Int. 1), Heather opens up about the value of play and how teachers should be aware of how important they are in guiding children's play. Another thing Heather mentions is that teachers should be aware of not trying to over stimulate the children. "*I would like to add that teachers might also be trying to stimulate children all the time, without just enjoying them. I think one of the most wonderful things is to have a relationship with the children*" (Int. 1).

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4.5.4.3   Subtheme: School context and teachers' play pedagogy

Heather has a very positive outlook when talking about her school context and how children play. She believes that an interactive relationship with stakeholders like headmasters, parents and preschool teachers are very important (Int. 2). Setting realistic expectations for the learning environment and children involved is something Heather encourages.

4.6   THE CASE OF HAILEY

Getting to know Hailey

Hailey has a lot of patience and her professionalism in her work is evident. She believes in teaching children basic skills at the beginning of the year which will help them to play and explore safely. Hailey has been teaching children between the ages of 0-5 years for 26 years. She is currently teaching 3-4 year olds. Hailey completed her certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at UNISA in 2012. In Figure 4.17 (below) Hailey's photos and general thoughts on learning through play are presented.

Figure 4.17: Hailey's photo collage of children learning through play

Hailey believes that it is important for 3-4 year old children to engage in a lot of activities that involve sensory experiences.

4.6.1 THEME 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Hailey's personal background about learning through play is shaped by her childhood memories and these ideas are supported by her professional development. Her childhood memories and professional development can be described as follow:

4.6.1.1 Subtheme: Childhood memories

Hailey did not attend a preschool as child, but has many pleasant memories of playing as a child. She remembers that she learned that boys' play is very different from girls' play. She wore her mother's clothes and pretended that she was a princess for the day while the boys played completely different games. Hailey feels that she developed socially through her own play as a child (Int. 2). She also remembers "*playing with cups and saucers in the sand. I remember baking mud cakes and pretending to eat them*" (Int. 2). Hailey wants children to have fun, just as she had fun playing as child.

4.6.1.2 Subtheme: Professional development

Her years of practical experience as preschool teacher taught her a lot more than completing a certificate in ECE. "*I worked for 20 years as a preschool teacher without any formal education. I never felt that I was inferior because of this... Later I did a diploma at UNISA and what I learned through UNISA and read up in the books was not something new to me*" (Int. 2).

4.6.2 THEME 2: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Hailey thinks that play allows children to feel more at ease. She has found that when trying to teach or assess what has been taught, children respond better during play than when forced to do certain things*. "When you create a playful situation ... the children gladly and spontaneously want to participate"* (Int. 2). Hailey's personal understanding and believes about learning through play are also captured in how she describes the way in which the social environment influences children's different types of play. She also thinks that the development of skills while children play is important.

4.6.2.1 Subtheme: The social environment influences children's different types of play

Early on in Hailey's first semi-structured interview she mentioned that children's play is shaped by their social environment or circumstances. She talks about how gender differences influence children's play. She also feels that children's development might differ even if they are of the same age (Int. 1). Hailey also mentions how children's "*emotions and needs*" (Int. 1) should to be taken into account during play. On the influence of technology on children's natural play she says: "*when I was young we used to play naturally, because there were no other alternatives*" (Int. 2), but now children's social environment has changed as they play with the *"TV or iPad or electrical toy cars"* (Int. 2). Hailey thinks that due to the influence of

technology children's creativity is stunted and that they do not have *"to play creatively anymore"* (Int. 2).

4.6.2.2 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills

Hailey introduces cognitive knowledge to children in an intriguing way while doing arts and crafts. She, for instance, introduces children to the concept of time in the following way: "*they are … made aware of a time limit they have for each activity and that they should maximise the learning opportunity*" (Int. 1). Hailey will ring a bell or tell the children to move to the next table when their time to complete an activity is up. She also promotes colour recognition by giving children coloured bands to wear. The leader of the table then has to "*check that all the children wearing, for instance, a green band is at the specific table and if another child is there, not wearing the green band, they should tell them where to go*" (Int. 1).

4.6.2.3 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills

Figure 4.18: Hailey ~ Photo 1 – *Outdoor play*; Photo 6 – *Drawing freely*

In Figure 4.18 (Photo 1 – *Outdoor play*) Hailey noted that children developed many emotional and social skills including "*self confidence, courage, working with others, waiting their turn and interacting*" (NR) through play. Hailey thinks that it is important that children develop a belief in themselves and that this will "*allow children to do things on their own*" (Int. 1). In Figure 4.18 (Photo 6 – *Drawing freely*) Hailey explains how children are able to express their feelings and thoughts through this activity (NR).

4.6.2.4 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills

Figure 4.19: Hailey ~ Photo 2 – *Playing with play dough*; Photo 4 – *Playing in the sand*

Hailey describes how children in Figure 4.19 (Photo 2 – *Playing with play dough*) are able to develop fine motor skills (NR). Figure 4.19 (Photo 4 – *Playing in the sand*) reflects gross motor development (NR). Hailey also talks about how children develop physical skills like "*awareness of own body, control over movement of the body, hand-foot coordination and balance*" (NR) during play.

4.6.3 THEME 3: THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

Hailey believes that free play is of the utmost importance to young children and that children are more relaxed during free play and able to perform better (Int. 1, Int. 2). She notes: "*There needs to be free play. It is important that free play takes place for at least an hour and a half in the morning and then a lot more in the afternoon. I think it is very important that children should play. This includes indoors and outdoors*" (Int. 2).

4.6.3.1 Subtheme: Indoor play

Hailey wants children to be able to make their own choices and feel comfortable when playing indoors. She believes that children's play is enhanced if the indoor learning environment, with different play areas, "*[has] enough space*" (Int. 1) to play in. She wants to "*hear that the children*" (Int. 1) enjoy playing. She also believes that there are times when silence is needed in a class. Hailey does however not mind a little bit of noise when the children are playing freely in the classroom.

4.6.3.2 Subtheme: Outdoor play

When Hailey talks about outdoor play she regards children's safety during play as very important. "*The climbing apparatus should be safe. Teachers should always be aware of children's safety in regard to how they play and with what they are playing*" (Int. 2). For example "*You can take them to sit under a big tree and count the leaves, doing mathematics,*

rather than sitting in the class ... If you try to achieve goals by doing it in a playful manner, for instance outside ... you could accomplish a lot more with children" (Int. 2). One gets the idea that Hailey likes the idea of children learning playfully in a relaxed environment, like when outside.

4.6.4 THEME 4: TEACHER'S PRACTICE (STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY)

The most important strategy Hailey uses to enhance learning through play is teaching children how to play. She shows children that through play *"they are achieving important results"* (Int. 2). Hailey's teaching practice seems to be relaxed, but goal orientated. *"[C]hildren should play to achieve certain goals"* (Int. 2), she says. She believes play lends itself to countless learning opportunities and believes that children present better results when they play, not when forced to do things that are not in their interest, but rather *"one needs to expose them to a lot of things which will be new and interesting to them"* (Int. 1).

4.6.4.1 Subtheme: Curriculum

Hailey often resorts to other teachers, like Grade R teachers, to assist her with what she should be teaching the children. In response to how she feels about the absence of a curriculum for children younger than Grade R she says: "*It is actually a pity, because you need guidelines, especially in preschools where initiative is not taken. There might not be Grade R teachers who follow a specific curriculum and could guide you. Teachers like us need to have guidance"* (Int. 1). She continues by saying that "*we have no guidance in assisting these children to reach higher levels of achievement. There is a great gap and you try to use what works. There needs to be guidance and structure for us in this regard"* (Int. 1).

4.6.4.2 Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

When talking about the relationship teachers should have with children in relation to their play, Hailey believes that it is important that teachers "*adapt to the child's level"* (Int. 1), being aware of their feelings and circumstances and having "*a strong relationship with the children in your class"* (Int. 1). She sees herself as a person who guides the children a lot at first. The teacher also needs to teach them how they should play, for example, to avoid them from "*putting play dough into their ears and so on"* (Int. 1). She does however say that one should later take a step back and allow the children to discover on their own. "*If you always prescribe what they should do, they will not have any initiative"* (Int. 1). She is of opinion that teachers need to know what children are able to do and to help them. "*You can build on their knowledge, taking them from what they were able to do and then challenging them to achieve even more difficult standards... make notes of what the children are able to do and what not. This will help you to build on their skills and knowledge of different developmental areas"* (Int. 2).

4.6.4.3   Subtheme: School context and teachers' play pedagogy

In Hailey's specific school context she experiences the importance of having an adequate number of staff to assist with the children. She also feels that "*teachers have to guide children during play and be in control. There should be enough personnel in order to delegate different responsibilities*" (Int. 2). A major concern for her is when parents have unreasonable demands that influence how she educates the children. An example is when parents ask that their children should not get dirty. She believes those parents are "*robbing children of their learning experiences*" (Int. 2). In response to how she would like learning through play to take place in South Africa she says: "*I would like play to be more evident in classrooms. I know that there are certain things you have to do with children, but I would like children to learn more through play*" (Int. 2).

4.7   THE CASE OF KATHERINE

Getting to know Katherine

Katherine is a young, caring and loving teacher. Her devotion to the education of the children in her class is remarkable. Katherine has been working at the same preschool since 2005, thus for 9 years now. She teaches 4-5 year old children. She completed her B.Ed. at UNISA in 2012. In Figure 4.20 below, Katherine's photos and general thoughts on learning through play are presented.

Figure 4.20: Katherine's photo collage of children learning through play

She believes that play should be fun and enjoyable, leading to the discovery of wonderful surprises. She mostly sets out specific learning goals for the children, but believes that it is through self-exploration that the children will achieve these goals.

4.7.1 THEME 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Katherine's personal background about learning through play is captured in her childhood memories and professional development.

4.7.1.1 Subtheme: Childhood memories

Katherine did not attend preschool as child, but remembers having a lot of space and time to play. She loved to *"climb trees and jump off walls"* (Int. 2). She feels that as child she was allowed to take more risks and had fewer limitations than children do today. She does not allow the children in her class to engage in this type of risky play. "*I will not do that with the children, because of certain limitations one has and parents who will not allow such things*" (Int. 2). Katherine does, however, feel that she can relate to children and how they play. *"I do try to do things with the children that I enjoyed as child and create fun experiences for them. I try to make them aware of the fact that one can think of your own fun games to play*" (Int. 2).

4.7.1.2 Subtheme: Professional development

Katherine regards teacher education as a major area of concern. She believes that the University of Pretoria offers more opportunity for students to acquire practical experience in teaching young children than the University of South Africa, who according to her "*focuses more on written knowledge"* (Int. 2). Her opinion is that students, like those studying through UNISA, should do what she did and try to work at a preschool while studying. Katherine also thinks that lecturers and "*their own opinions and beliefs might also impact how the education of teachers takes place"* (Int. 2).

4.7.2 THEME 2: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY
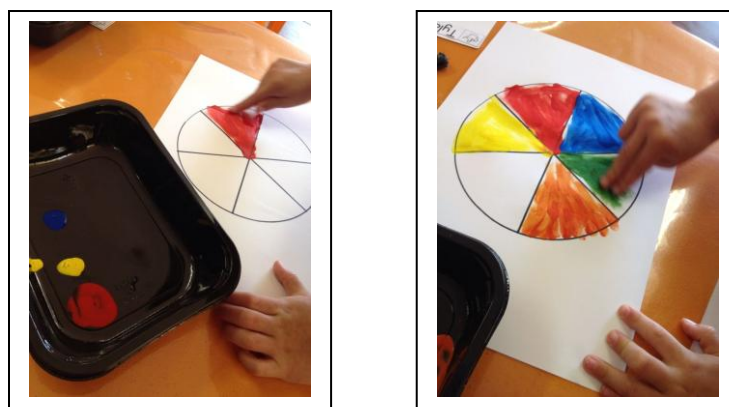
Figure 4.21: Katherine ~ Photos 5 & 6 – *Colour wheels*

"*When I think about a young child and learning, the word experimenting comes to mind. I think that they learn through experimenting. Something that I truly believe is that children should do things on their own and learn by experimenting by themselves*" (Int. 2), as demonstrated in

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Figure 4.21 (Photos 5 & 6 – *Colour wheels*). Katherine wants children to experience and learn things on their own: "*they mixed the paint themselves and saw how it changed colour in front of their own eyes*" (NR). She believes that children should learn things in a playful manner and that they will acquire knowledge and experience through play which they will be able to carry into their adulthood (Int. 1).

4.7.2.1 Subtheme: The social environment influences children's different types of play

Katherine mentioned how children have a lot of pressure nowadays to perform according to specific standards and she has observed how some teachers keep children indoors to "work", instead of letting them play outside. This is something that Katherine expressed concern about (FN – 2 September 2014). The social environment where children could play carefree outside has changed according to Katherine: "*nowadays children are kept indoors and it is easier to go sit and read a book or watch TV. Children are actually restricted and do not get as much exposure to nature and playing outdoors*" (Int. 2).

4.7.2.2 Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills

Figure 4.22: Katherine ~ Photo 1 – *Acorns*; Photo 3 – *Baking and making*; Photo 8 – *Egg containers*

The photos above provide evidence of the fact that Katherine takes note of how children develop cognitively through play. In Figure 4.22 (Photo 1 – *Acorns*) children picked up acorns while playing outside. She used this opportunity and turned it into a mathematical learning experience (FN – 9 April 2014). In her narrative reflections she talks about "*mathematical skills... counting instruments... [and] number recognition*" (NR). She feels that these examples help children while they are playing. During an interview Katherine said that children are able to make use of problem solving skills to determine cause and effect: "*if I do this, that will happen*" (Int. 1). She also mentioned how higher order thinking can be observed when children are given the responsibility of being the leader of their table. "*I have table leaders as well, each table is a certain colour and the table leader of the day has the responsibility of laying the table for their fiends and giving everyone tea. They also have to count the bread and in this way they are also doing mathematics* (Int. 1). She further explains in her lesson plans that children

should be able to categorize (lesson plans). Measuring, counting and number recognition are all mathematic components Katherine regards as important (as revealed in Figure 4.22).

4.7.2.3   Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills

By playing and "*working in groups*" (Int. 1) children are offered the opportunity to get to know their friends and they engage emotionally and socially with others. Katherine was able to link the development of children's emotional knowledge and skills with play. According to Katherine reading books and engaging in fantasy play, helps children with socialization (Int. 1). Helping children to feel safe during play is important to Katherine, but "*structure is also important. There are times when they need structure and guidance to ground learning that has taken place*" (Int. 2). Katherine writes in her narrative reflections that children are able to connect socially and emotionally by comparing things they do with their friends (NR).

4.7.2.4   Subtheme: Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills

Figure 4.23:   Katherine ~ Photo 7 – *Cows made from play dough*; Photo 18 – *Obstacle course*; Photo 22 – *Musical bean bags*

Katherine's photos and narrative reflections reveal the children's development of physical and motor skills. In Figure 4.23 (Photo 18 - *Obstacle course*) the children were given a variety of stations where they had to perform specific skills like "*hopping, jumping and throwing*" (NR). She came up with an interesting way to adapt the usual musical chairs game by changing it to "*musical bean bags*" (NR). In Figure 4.23 (Photo 22 - *Musical bean bags*) children played the well known game of musical chairs, but they *"had to go sit down on a bean bag"* (NR) instead. Katherine also demonstrates in Figure 4.23 (Photo 7 - *Cows made from play dough*) how children make use of fine motor skills to manipulate the play dough as well as "*touch and feel*" (NR) while they are playing.

4.7.3   THEME 3: THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

Katherine believes that children "learn through play, but that does not mean that they should be left alone to only participate in free play" (Int. 1). The way in which Katherine views

children's free play can be better understood by looking at their learning environment, including indoor and outdoor play spaces.

4.7.3.1   Subtheme: Indoor play

Providing children with a variety of materials to play with indoors is something that Katherine believes to be important. By letting children explore with different media throughout the year, Katherine feels that it allows her to assess them fairly. "*You should expose them to everything, because if you do not expose them to it and you take it out on a day that you want to assess them and they were never exposed to it, things will be chaotic*" (Int. 1). Therefore Katherine introduces learning concepts to children in a playful manner. These experiences help them "*to understand something better or to do something easier, because they have been taught to learn in a playful way*" (Int. 1). Katherine explains how it is necessary to allow children to use their imaginations during play. About Figure 4.24, she wrote: "*they started playing spontaneously during fantasy play. They took the tables and created their own restaurant*" (NR). Figure 4.24 (Photo 12– *Race*) demonstrates a game with rules that children enjoyed playing.

Figure 4.24: Katherine ~ Photo 12 – *Race*; Photo 14 – *Restaurant game*

4.7.3.2   Subtheme: Outdoor play

During outdoor play, Katherine wants children to be aware of rules. She says: "*Rules for play are very important to children*" (Int. 2), not only to keep them safe, but also to teach them "*that rules are important in everyday life*" (Int. 2). She explains the importance of safety: "*when thinking of outdoor areas it is important that the equipment is held in a good condition*" (Int. 2).

4.7.4   THEME 4: TEACHER'S PRACTICE AND STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Katherine involves children in the learning process by letting them look at and touch objects, for example during art activities (Lesson plans). She wants children to be able to have opportunities to make important choices while they are playing (Int. 2). She is of the opinion that teachers' own experiences and personalities impact how they educate children. She says:

"*I think teachers' own experiences and even their personalities could impact children's play*" (Int. 2). Katherine's teaching practice is influenced by her vision of the role of the teacher during play, as well as her school context and play pedagogy.

4.7.4.1   Subtheme: Curriculum

Katherine is not aware of any policies or documents in South Africa that explain how young children should be educated. She states that she "*think[s] that they could, especially for teachers, implement [policies or documents] to give you guidance and inform you whether you are on the right track or not*" (Int. 1). Adequate education on how young children learn is something that Katherine regards as essential. "*There might be teachers who do not think or feel the same about play"* (Int. 1).

4.7.4.2   Subtheme: The role of the teacher during play activities

Katherine regards herself as a motherly figure in children's lives and thinks "*that the teacher and child have a strong relationship, because they are with you the whole day. They are your responsibility. You are like a mother to them*" (Int. 1). She believes that children should learn and discover on their own, "*but I also think it is important that teachers facilitate and help and sometimes guide them*" (Int. 1). A teacher should be able to identify children's needs, according to Katherine. "*One can even offer them more play material*" (Int. 2). By listening to children's ideas and responding to it "*and assisting them to put their ideas into practice"* (Int. 2), Katherine displays the ability of a teacher who involves children in their own learning processes during play.

4.7.4.3   Subtheme: School context and teachers' play pedagogy

Katherine believes that one should examine the space you have available and try to "*benefit [from] and use each area to its full potential"* (Int. 2). She explains how one can use play to change the class atmosphere and calm the children down. She has a pedagogy that is absolutely in favour of play and "*would like teachers to have the same passion and love for children as I do*" (Int. 2). She believes that children are not exposed to play at home as much as they should be and that it is *"the teacher's goal nowadays to teach children to learn through play"* (Int. 1).

4.8   SUMMARIZING CASE STUDIES

A table is presented below to summarise each of the case studies: Pauline, Pearl, Heather, Hailey and Katherine, and their views and opinions of how children learn through play.

Table 4.1: Summarizing the case studies

	Pauline	Pearl	Heather	Hailey	Katherine
Getting to know the participants (background information)	She teaches 4-5 years old children. Graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2012.	Has been teaching children for 27 years. Completed a teaching diploma. Teaches 3-4 year old children.	She finished a BprimEd degree in 2002. She has experience in teaching children 0-9 years old.	Hailey has been teaching children for 26 years. She currently teaches 3-4 year olds. In 2012 she completed a certificate in Early Childhood Development.	She has 9 years of experience in teaching children. She currently teaches 4-5 year olds. She completed a degree in Early Childhood Education in 2012.
Themes					
Theme 1: Personal background about learning through play	Pauline believes that children understand, engage, explore and learn during play.	Pearl wants children to be engaged in their own learning through play.	Heather sees play as a wonderful way for children to learn. She wants children to learn everything through play.	Hailey wants children to have many sensory experiences during play.	According to Katherine play should be fun and lead to great discoveries.
Subtheme 1.1: *Childhood memories*	She remembers having freedom to play as a child at preschool without strict rules.	She did not receive enough guidance to make sense of learning through play when she was a child. She wants children to experience positivity in her class.	Heather has joyful memories of play and it is due to this that she became a teacher.	She never attended preschool, but has many fun memories of playing as a child.	Katherine did not attend preschool, but has memories of enjoying risky play (climbing trees and swinging high).
Subtheme 1.2: *Professional development*	She views her professional development as inadequate as it did not equip her with enough knowledge about what learning through play truly is and how it should be implemented.	She regards practical application as the most important aspect during professional development.	She wants to constantly improve her knowledge on children's play and considers this crucial to one's professional development.	She taught children of different ages for 24 years before completing a form of teacher education and is of opinion that experience in teaching is more important than qualifications.	She worked as a full time preschool teacher while finishing her degree and believes that this is the best way to enhance one's professional development.
Theme 2: Personal understanding and beliefs about learning through play	Pauline believes that play is valuable to children and that the teacher should know when to get involved in children's play.	According to Pearl preschool teachers' own knowledge and beliefs about children's play influence their learning.	Children's play is influenced by their cultures and traditions. Children can learn everything through play.	Hailey believes that play helps children to feel more at ease. They learn important skills through play.	Katherine thinks that children learn by experimenting and exploring during play.

	Pauline	Pearl	Heather	Hailey	Katherine
Subtheme 2.1: *The social environment influences children's different types of play*	Pauline is convinced that children play less nowadays than in the past due to modernisation.	Gender identification, technology and different media are all relevant to children's social environment.	Children's social environments are impacted by cultures, traditions and their everyday lives.	Gender differences, children's age and their developmental needs all influence how children play.	Some preschool teachers keep children indoors for longer and occupied with activities, thus negatively influencing children and their social environment.
Subtheme 2.2: *Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills*	Cognitive knowledge and skills develop while children play with objects like blocks and learn to solve problems.	Sorting, counting, doing mathematics and enjoying creativity contribute to the development of cognitive knowledge and skills.	Heather pointed out that children's cognitive knowledge is often fuelled by their natural curiosity to learn.	Children's cognitive knowledge and skills are addressed during everyday activities.	Categorising, number recognition, colour recognition and counting develop through play.
Subtheme 2.3: *Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills*	Play is used as a tool to establish the emotional circumstances of children. Children acquire social knowledge and skills through play.	Children develop emotional skills while engaging with other children, especially during role play and fantasy play.	Emotional intelligence develops through play and children build interpersonal relationships while playing.	Hailey argues that it is important that children learn to do things by themselves, assisting in emotional and social development.	Playing in groups helps with emotional and social development. Creating structure for emotional well being is very important.
Subtheme 2.4: *Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills*	Pauline argues that children should be physically active. They acquire gross and fine motor skills through play.	Different motor skills develop through children being active and playing.	Physical skills like tactile awareness, good eye co-ordination, gross motor skills and fine motor skills develop during play.	Hand-eye coordination, balance and awareness of one's body develop through play.	Children should hop, jump and throw during play. They should also be allowed to learn by touching and feeling materials.
Theme 3: The role of free play	Play can be structured or unstructured, but children learn more through unstructured play.	Learning and stimulation has to take place during free play.	Free play can be used to help children achieve developmental goals.	A lot of time should be set aside to allow children to play freely.	Engagement between preschool teachers and children during free play is important.
Subtheme 3.1: *Indoor play*	Unstructured, indoor free play is essential for children. Different areas indoors accommodate the activity levels of children. Hands-on experiences should be provided.	Music can assist in creating a good atmosphere for children to play indoors.	It is easier to observe children's play and determine their moods while playing indoors.	Having a logical, structured setup indoors helps children to play comfortably. A little bit of noise should be tolerated.	A variety of learning materials should be provided for the children during free play indoors.

	Pauline	Pearl	Heather	Hailey	Katherine
Subtheme 3.2: *Outdoor play*	The outdoor learning environment has to be inviting. Children's curiosity and interest needs to be addressed during outdoor play.	Children need colourful equipment and toys to play with outdoors.	The safety of the children has to be considered during outdoor play.	Children should be able to play outside safely.	Rules and safety are important to consider during free play outdoors.
Theme 4: **Teachers' practices: strategies used to enhance learning through play**	Pauline wants children to play and have fun without them knowing that they are actually learning. She guides children during exploration to enhance learning through play.	She is a creative teacher and wants children to learn things for themselves in a creative manner. She uses play to let children learn. She also uses every day, real-life objects to support and enhance play.	Heather wants children to be exposed to as many playful situations as possible to help accelerate their learning opportunities.	Hailey uses play as a teaching strategy, showing children that when they play they are achieving many goals.	Children should be allowed freedom to make choices during play. She enhances children's learning by allowing them to get involved in their own learning processes.
Subtheme 4.1: *Curriculum*	She simplifies the Grade R curriculum and uses it as a guideline for Grade RR.	The lack of a preschool curriculum causes her to wish for more structure and guidance on educating 3-4 year old children.	She uses the Grade R curriculum and her awareness of developmental milestones to educate children pre-Grade R.	She wishes that there were a curriculum and more guidance to educate 3-4 year olds. She asks other teachers for advice and uses this as a guideline.	Katherine noted that there is an absence of a preschool curriculum pre-Grade R. She would have liked to receive more guidance on educating children between the ages of 4-5.
Subtheme 4.2: *The role of the teacher during play activities*	She believes that preschool teachers sometimes need to motivate children to play, but should not disrupt children's play.	She believes preschool teachers should positively influence children's play.	Preschool teachers need to facilitate children's learning. Heather believes it is important to have realistic expectations of the children and how they learn through play.	Preschool teachers should adapt to the children's level and have a strong relationship with them to support their play.	Teachers should facilitate and guide children during play.
Subtheme 4.3: *School context and teacher's play pedagogy*	According to Pauline optimal learning through play is underpinned by support, time and open-ended play material.	Pearl believes it would be best to always use play as a learning medium.	Good relationships between teachers and parents are encouraged.	She values the availability of enough personnel to help take care of the children; allowing children's play to excel.	She believes that preschool teachers who have a love and passion for teaching will promote playful learning.

4.9 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES

4.9.1 PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSONAL BACKGROUND ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

In this study teachers' personal backgrounds of learning through play were embedded in their childhood memories and professional development. Kieff and Casbergue (2000: 16) refer to "one's knowledge about play, past experiences with play, and values regarding play" and this is of significance when considering one's background of learning through play.

Varied responses to preschool teachers' childhood memories of play can be identified. Pauline recalls being allowed to play freely and unrestricted. Pearl felt that she was not stimulated enough as a child (Int. 1), while Heather's preschool memories of play "*were so joyful that I think it inspired me to also become a teacher*" (Int. 2). Hailey did not attend preschool, but remembers "*playing with cups and saucers in the sand*" (Int. 2). Katherine also did not attend preschool, but remembers having the time and space to play.

Preschool teachers feel that their own childhood memories influence the way in which they teach young children. Childhood memories of play as well as their education programmes and thoughts about their professional development differ remarkably. Both Pauline and Hailey feel that their educational programmes (Pauline completed her degree in Early Childhood Development while Hailey completed her certificate in Early Childhood Development) were insufficient and insignificant. Pauline's response in relation to her own tertiary education was: "*I feel we are exposed too little at university*" (Int. 1), and Hailey responded by saying: "*what I learned through UNISA and read up in the books was not something new to me*" (Int. 2). Heather, however, sees the education of teachers as extremely important and she has a love for academics. She mentioned how she wished she could improve her knowledge and expertise in the education of young children. Katherine expressed her concern about the degree of difference in how teachers are educated at the different tertiary institutions and said that the University of Pretoria wants teachers to acquire practical experience in teaching young children while UNISA "*focuses more on written knowledge*" (Int. 2). Pearl felt that teachers should be educated on the importance of demonstrating things to children and allowing them to experience things practically. She also said that the way lecturers "*educate students has great impact on future teachers*" (Int. 2).

4.9.2 PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

The ability of some preschool teachers to make use of meta-cognition or the awareness of one's own thought processes (Oxford Dictionary, 2014), understandings and beliefs about learning through play, as well as others' thoughts regarding learning through play was truly fascinating. Pearl said that she believed teachers' knowledge about play as well as their experiences with play is what cause them to teach in a certain manner. She also mentioned how conflicting opinions regarding children's learning can be frustrating at times (Int. 2).

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Heather talked about how South African children's play is unique, because it *"relates to their traditions and their culture is captured"* (Int. 1).

Findings of teachers' understanding and beliefs regarding learning through play were illustrated in their opinion of the social environment influencing children's play, how Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills, the influence play has on children's emotional knowledge and skills as well as how Different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills.

With regard to the social environment influencing play, the role of developing technology and the increased need for interesting, stimulating learning materials seemed to be something most teachers talked about. Heather said that children's play reflect their natural daily lives and "*one can now see how it is also reflected in modern times*" (Int. 2). In addition Pearl said *"technology and different media also impact children's play... I think it is because of how they grow up and what is familiar to them"* (Int. 2). Katherine talked about how children's social environment nowadays causes them to stay indoors. She says: "*Nowadays children are kept indoors and it is easier to go sit and read a book or watch TV. Children are actually restricted and do not get as much exposure to nature and playing outdoors*" (Int. 2). Hailey talked about how she believes technology has greatly influenced children causing them *"to not have to play creatively anymore"* (Int. 2).

The influence that play has on children's development of cognitive knowledge and skills was evident in four of the five teachers' photovoices and narrative reflections. Comments in their narrative reflections like "*[develop] important mathematical skills and… cognitive thoughts*" (NR of Pauline). Pauline also remarks: *"During this process they are learning mathematics, because they have to estimate the value of different products"* (NR). According to Katherine the following skills develop: "*mathematical skills... counting... [and] number recognition*" (NR). These are only a few of many examples portraying preschool teachers' awareness of how children develop cognitive knowledge and skills through play. Although Hailey did not have evidence by means of photos and narrative reflections regarding her thoughts about how children develop cognitive knowledge and skills through play, she confirmed this idea in her interview. During her first semi-structured interview she said the following: *"They are also made aware of a time limit they have for each activity... check that all the children for instance wearing a green band are at the specific table and if another child is there, not wearing the green band, they should tell them where to go*" (Int. 1).

The influence play has on children's emotional knowledge and skills was another subject the preschool teachers could relate to and provide opinions of. They said it was important to keep children's emotional state during play in mind. Heather stated: **"*emotional intelligence, that is now the buzz word, is so much more important than your* IQ. *This cannot develop without enough play"* (Int. 1). Pauline felt it important that "*children should have fun while playing*" (Int.

2). Katherine said that in order to allow children emotional safety and well-being during play "*[t]here are times when they need structure and guidance*" (Int. 2). The way in which children socialise with one another is another component impacting the development of emotional knowledge and skills. Pearl said that children's emotional skills as well as "*social skills are developed*" (NR) during play. Heather wrote about how interactional relationships are built through play as "*[a] platform is created where children are made aware of other's feelings, desires and rights and realise that as these things are important to themselves they are also important to others*" (NR).

The way different types of play develop children's physical and motor skills was also discussed in detail by all the preschool teachers. In their photovoices and narrative reflections the teachers made many references to the development of children's physical and motor skills. This was also noted during the interviews. Pauline wrote about how children "*develop gross and fine motor skills*" (NR) during play and mentioned how she thought it was important that children learn and develop by being "*busy and physically active*" (Int. 1). Pearl concurs with Pauline's notion of children being active by saying children are "*active beings... you cannot expect them to sit still all the time, because then they will not take in what you are trying to teach them*" (Int. 1). Heather focuses on a wide variety of physical and motor skills being developed by children in her photovoice and narrative reflections. She talks about "*tangible abilities... tactile perception, awareness and exploration*" (NR) being developed during play. She also explains how fine and gross motor skills are developed by "*using their arm and shoulder muscles, aiming and using good eye-hand coordination... fine motor skills [are developed] when working with the materials*" (NR) during the different games they play. Hailey also made a remark about the development of gross and fine motor skills during play. In her narrative reflections she wrote how children develop fine motor skills when playing with play dough and in the sandpit. In addition she wrote about how children develop physical skills like: "*awareness of own body, control over body movement, hand-foot coordination and balance*" (NR) during play. Katherine's photovoice and narrative reflections revealed that she regards children's physical development as extremely important. In her narrative reflections she wrote about how specific skills like "*hopping, jumping and throwing*" (NR) are developed through play. She also thinks that teachers should adapt existing games and capture children's interests through these games, allowing the development of physical skills to take place without their knowledge. Like Hailey, she also wrote about how children develop fine motor skills and *"touch and feel"* (NR) while playing with play dough.

4.9.3   THE ROLE OF FREE PLAY

It was interesting how this theme emerged as the data was collected. I noticed that when talking about the concept of learning through play the preschool teachers made an association of free play with learning through play. In this study the findings regarding teachers' association of free play with learning through play are discussed via indoor and outdoor play.

Pauline felt that "*hands-on experiences are... important in the classroom*" (Int. 1). Pearl talked about how she makes use of music during indoor play to guide the mood of the children. Heather mentioned how she observes children during indoor free play, especially fantasy play. "*Play is an important medium to understand what children experience as it is expressed during their role play*" (NR), says Heather. When Hailey talked about free play indoors, she felt it important that "*children should have enough space*" (Int. 1) to play. Katherine expressed how she wanted children to get as much exposure to different play media indoors as possible.

Preschool teachers made interesting comments in saying that the outdoor environment where children play should not be static, but that changes should be made to make things interesting. Pauline said that "*[c]hildren love to play with new things that they are not used to rather than playing with things they are allowed to play with everyday*" (Int. 2). Pearl also feels that children should be stimulated during outdoor play: "*Children grow up with a lot of media and need to be stimulated a lot. They need more colourful things than we needed as children*" (Int. 2). Safety during outdoor play was also something the teachers pointed out. "*Children should know what is expected of them, games they are allowed to play... otherwise they will be insecure and will not be able to play to their full potential*" (Int. 2, Hailey). Katherine also commented on children's safety by talking about the importance of rules when children play outdoors: "*[r]ules for play are very important to children*", not only to keep them safe, but also to teach them "*that rules are important in everyday life*" (Int. 2). The outdoor equipment is another thing Katherine felt should be safe for children to play on: "*When thinking of outdoor areas it is important that the equipment be held in good condition and children are able to play safely*" (Int. 2).

4.9.4   TEACHER'S PRACTICE: STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

The findings of this study in relation to teacher practice looked into teachers' experiences and opinions regarding a curriculum for children aged 3-5. It inquired into the strategies preschool teachers use to enhance learning through play as well as how they perceive the role of teachers during play activities.

When asked if teachers were aware of any national curriculum policies or documents to educate children younger than Grade R all the teachers responded that they were not aware of any policies or documents. Both Pauline and Heather talked about how the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grade R is simplified or watered down to at least have something to work from. Pauline said "*[w]e also use the Grade R curriculum and simplify it to find ideas for Grade RR*" (Int. 2). Heather said that many schools "*water down CAPS*" (Int. 1) and "*I think it is sad that there is not a CAPS for younger children and you know at each school the same type of stimulation is taking place. I think there is a gap, because all children are not prepared in the same manner for Grade R*" (Int. 1). When Pearl talked about her feelings in regard to the lack of a curriculum policy or statement for 3-4 year old children (the

age she teaches) she said that she wished "*more structure and guidance*" (Int. 1) could be given. Hailey admitted that she resorts to Grade R teachers to provide some guidance on how children should be educated. She expressed her feelings of dismay in regard to the lack of a substantial curriculum policy or statement by saying: "*It is actually a pity, because you need guidelines, especially in preschools where initiative is not taken. There might not be Grade R teachers who follow a specific curriculum and could guide you*" (Int. 1). She continued by saying that "*we have no guidance to help us assist these children to reach higher levels of achievement. There is a great gap and you try to use what works. There needs to be guidance and structure for us in this regard*" (Int. 1). Katherine agrees with these teachers and says: "*I think that they could, especially for teachers, implement this to give you guidance and inform you whether you are on the right track or not*" (Int. 1).

Findings strongly suggest that teachers believe they play an important role in stimulating and encouraging play among young children. Pauline expressed how she gets involved in children's play: "*I think that children should be taught to play sometimes. One can give them ideas on what they could play. Sometimes I will build something with the children so that they can get possibilities on how they could play with certain toys*" (Int. 2). Pauline does however mention that it is important that teachers do not interfere with children's play. She comments that "*the teacher should not get very involved in children's play and disrupt their play*" (Int. 1), thus preventing them from learning on their own. Pearl believes that the teacher should know what is familiar to children from their everyday life and "*stimulate them by asking questions that relate to their daily lives and of things they are familiar with and then you build on what they know*" (Int. 1). Building on what children know is something Hailey also talked about: "*You can build on their knowledge, taking them from what they were able to do and then challenging them to achieve even more difficult standards... make notes of what the children are able to do and what not. This will help you to build on their skills and knowledge of different developmental areas*" (Int. 2).

Pearl talked about how "*[y]ou as teacher need to be visible and intervene when needed*" (Int. 2). Intervening when needed is also what Heather talked about in her interview. She also described how teachers should facilitate during children's play and engage with children during play. Heather said that teachers should use play as a tool to allow children to "*learn more and memorise less*" (Int. 1). Katherine talked about facilitating children's learning, she said: "*but I also think it is important that teachers facilitate and help sometimes and guide them*" (Int. 1).

The preschool teachers suggest that children should be allowed to get involved in their own learning processes. "*I am absolutely in favour of hands on experiences that allow children to discover and try things on their own... So children learn much better when they themselves experiment... and choose on their own how they will do it and how they will play with it*" (Int. 1, Pauline). Pauline also said that it is the teachers' responsibility to make children "*aware of their achievements by saying 'look what you just built' or 'put a door there'… This develops their*

self-esteem and the following day they will find it easier and more enjoyable to do these activities" (Int. 1). Katherine talks about how teachers should assist children by listening and responding, helping *"to put their ideas into practice"* (Int. 2). Pearl mentioned how allowing children to explore and learn on their own helps them to *"learn faster and remember better"* (Int. 1).

The relationship between children and the teacher was something else the preschool teachers had a lot to say about. Pearl's view is that teachers should be encouraging and positive towards children. She believes that teachers should know the children in their class and be able to approach them positively. *"I believe in a positive attitude from the teacher. Children are very sensitive to negativity and then they behave accordingly"* (Int. 1), Pearl said. Heather provides a unique opinion on the relationship that preschool teachers should have with children and says that teachers should see play through the eyes of children to truly understand its nature. This is something Hailey also confirms when saying that teachers should *"adapt to the child's level"* (Int. 1). Katherine believes that the relationship between a preschool teacher and child is very strong and she sees herself as a motherly figure in the children's lives. "*The teacher and the children have a strong relationship, because they are with you the whole day. They are your responsibility. You are like a mother to them*" (Katherine, Int. 1).

It was interesting to find that when teachers examined their own school context and play pedagogy there seemed to be a conviction that children should spend more time outside and be provided with more opportunities to learn in a relaxed, playful atmosphere. Pearl mentioned that she feels play in her specific school context is sometimes misinterpreted and wishes that children had more opportunity to learn through play, rather than teachers who do "window dressing" to impress others (FN – 11 September 2014).

Katherine believes that children are not exposed to play enough, even at home. She thinks that *"the teacher's goal nowadays is to teach children to learn through play"* (Int. 1). Katherine also talks about how she wishes all teachers knew the value of play and "*would like teachers to have the same passion and love for children*" she has (Int. 2). Hailey agreed by saying: "*I would like teachers to have the same passion and love for children as I do*" (Int. 2). Heather mentioned how she believes that relationships between stakeholders, like parents, headmasters and preschool teachers, are very important for how learning through play will take place. She believes that setting realistic learning expectations will help children to learn better (Int. 2).

4.10   CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 presented the results of the data collected. Five case studies were presented and a clear interpretation of each case was presented in terms of their understanding and implementation of learning through play. Research questions were addressed through the data collected and the results were presented in a narrative and summarised in tables. In chapter five the research results will be compared with the literature. The research questions will be answered and the findings as well as recommendations of this study will be presented.

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CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 5 a conclusion of the research study is presented. In chapter 4 the research results from the respondents were reported according to themes and sub-themes as they emerged during the data analyses. The participants in this study shared their experiences, ideas and conceptions regarding learning through play, thus demonstrating their understanding and implementation of learning through play. The data analysis was guided by the literature, resulting in comparisons, contradictions and elaborations to be made (Barlow, 2010) on the five preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. The results from the research study are linked with the information presented in the literature study.

This chapter presents a comparison between the research results of this study to relevant concepts as well as theories from the literature review provided in chapter 2. The limitations of the study as well as ways in which these limitations can be addressed are also presented. The research questions, as indicated in chapter 1, are addressed and answered. Findings, recommendations, ideas for further research and final thoughts are given.

5.2 SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1

In Chapter 1 an introduction of the study was given. This chapter provided the reason why this study was done. Different ideas were presented. The reader was given insight into this specific field of research. It was underpinned by the background of the study, problem statement, rational and purpose of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 formed a very important part of this study. The conceptual framework was derived from the literature in chapter 2, aiding in the structuring of the data collection and the questions used during the interviews. The literature reviewed in this chapter focused on the specific research questions of this study, providing the information presented in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter described the research methodology that was used. The case study research method was used to present five cases of preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. Research methods and approaches relevant to the

study assisted in the collection of the relevant information in order to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

The results, describing preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play, are presented in Chapter 4. These results are embedded in the relevant themes and sub-themes used in this study.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter five concludes the research study by providing answers to the research questions. Findings, suggestions, recommendations and final thoughts are presented in order to conclude this research study.

5.3   COMPARING RESEARCH RESULTS WITH LITERATURE

To elaborate on the findings of the research the literature was consulted and summarised and it is presented in the table 5.1 below. The literature is compared to the findings of the study, according to the researcher's interpretation thereof.

Table 5.1: Compared research

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
Theme 1: **Personal background about learning through play**	Preschool teachers believe that play should be a wonderful and fun way for children to explore, discover, engage, understand and learn.	Children should learn through meaningful discoveries (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Ochiogu, 2013). Preschool teachers should encourage children by allowing them to learn in a fun way (Koralek, 2004). Using play as a teaching medium allows children to demonstrate advanced developmental skills (Pramling Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008).	This research study concurs with literature in finding that learning through play is fun for children. They discover, explore and develop the necessary developmental skills through playing.
Subtheme 1.1: *Childhood memories*	Most preschool teachers have positive memories of playing when they were children. Preschool teachers' own memories of play impact the way they teach play.	Playful memories from childhood might help a creative, playful spirit to flow (Almon, 2004). Preschool teachers' memories and experiences with play impact how they understand and teach play in their classrooms (Horsley & Penn, 2014).	In this research study preschool teachers' opinions, thoughts and feelings are similar to ideas and findings from the literature study. Preschool teachers in this study believe that their past and current experiences and memories of play impact the way in which they teach children to play.
Subtheme 1.2: *Professional development*	Professional development and teacher training were viewed as important, but some were convinced that their teacher education programmes/training was insufficient or insignificant.	The quality of teacher education programmes are a concern in South Africa (Botha, 2012). Insufficient teacher training might cause preschool teachers to be unaware of the value of learning through play (Lau & Cheng, 2010).	Most preschool teachers in this study were convinced that one's teacher training impacts your implementation of learning through play. One preschool teacher believed that teacher training was not as important as practical teaching experience.
Theme 2: **Personal understanding and beliefs about learning through play**	Preschool teachers in this study expressed how one's own knowledge and experiences influence how you teach learning through play. Each preschool teacher has their own ideas and convictions about learning through play. They realise that other preschool teachers	Personal experiences and a variety of teaching practices influence the implementation of learning through play (Flottman, McKernan & Tayler, 2011). Similarly Walsh and Petty (2007) mention that different notions and beliefs on how children should learn result in different	In this study preschool teachers were able to identify differences between their own beliefs and other teachers' ideas, convictions and teaching practices. The data collected from the teachers did not suggest that they had knowledge of addressing contradictions in beliefs by

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
	might differ from them regarding these ideas and convictions.	outcomes. To address these contradictions in beliefs, preschool teachers need to embrace principles of quality learning experiences for children (Van Heerden, 2012; Walsh & Petty, 2007).	providing children with specific quality learning experiences as suggested by the literature.
Subtheme 2.1: *The social environment influences children's different types of play*	In this study preschool teachers believe that due to children's exposure to a fast-paced, growing technological world, they need more stimulation and exciting learning materials to play and learn with. There were two teachers who mentioned that gender differences influence the way children play. The games that children play, especially during social play, reflect their everyday life experiences (at home and at school).	Kolucki and Lemish (2011) state that children's lives and play are influenced by media like books, magazines, television, radio, cinema, computers, the Internet and mobile phones. Smith et al. (2011) found that technology and media changes children's thought processes and thus the way they play. Fromberg and Bergen (2015) are convinced that technology based play should only be regarded as a type of play and that one should be interested in what they learn during this type of play. Children's social play usually includes pretend play or dramatic play (Gmitrova, Podhajeck & Gmitrov, 2009). Gender differences does impact the games that children play and how they play these games (Becky, 2010; Fromberg & Bergen, 2015)	Results from this study concurred with literature by determining that children's social environments are influenced by their experiences. These experiences include the impact of technology on their play, the way in which they perceive and embrace gender differences during play as well as their overall everyday life experiences.
Subtheme 2.2: *Different types of play develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills*	It was narrated and illustrated by the preschool teachers that children develop cognitive knowledge and skills through block play, playing with open-ended materials (like seeds), pretend play, outdoor play, drawing freely, painting, and assigning responsibilities in a playful manner.	Broadhead (2006); Clements (2004); Smith and Pellegrini (2013) and Van Heerden (2012) mention that sensory, social and pretend play as well as playing with objects assist children with discovering, learning and solving problems.	It is noticed that the preschool teachers were able to establish a link between the various types of play that affect children's cognitive knowledge and skills. Comparisons with literature and elaborations upon it can be made.

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
Subtheme 2.3: *Different types of play develop children's emotional knowledge and skills*	The preschool teachers in this study believe that children's emotional security and safety during all the different types of play is essential for optimal learning and development. It is also believed that children's social play and relationships with one another influence their emotional knowledge and skills. Children's freedom of choice during play offers them excitement and creates a willingness to learn. Preschool teachers remarked that children should be exposed to age-appropriate challenges during play.	It is suggested by Merewether and Fleet (2014) that preschool teachers establish children's emotional state during play by observing them and listening with intent. Offering children choices during play helps them to have meaningful learning experiences (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). A Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is founded upon how children develop, taking into account of their age, social situation and emotional well-being (Brock et al, 2013).	Results of this research study and literature concur on the importance of allowing children choices during play. Learning experiences are promoted when a stable and secure DAP is created in which children can develop according their developmental level (age, social situation and emotional well-being).
Subtheme 2.4: Different types of play develop children's physical knowledge and skills	In the preschool teachers' photos and narratives they explained that children develop physical knowledge and skills by playing in the sandpit, with play dough, on outdoor equipment, indoors with chairs or musical bean bags and so forth. Teachers illustrated many different games and types of play that can be used to develop children's physical knowledge and skills (including fine and gross motor skills, body awareness, spatial awareness, coordination and balance).	Locomotor play includes exercise play like running and climbing. Physical exercise helps to improve children's concentration (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Motional plays are sometimes initiated by teachers when they want children to develop a specific set of physical skills (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009).	The preschool teachers in this study displayed a wide variety of options and types of locomotor and motional plays that can assist children to develop various forms of physical knowledge and skills.
Theme 3: **The role of free play**	Preschool teachers made a strong connection between the term "learning through play" and free play.	Brock et al. (2013) state that formal teaching methods refer to "the planned programme of objectives" while informal teaching methods are the ones "taught by the school not necessarily in formal lessons" (Brock et al. 2013: 75). During free play young children need a learning environment that challenges them to learn	It could be said that free play is associated with informal teaching methods. In saying this, however, it does not mean that children's learning during free play should be ignored. They need a well structured environment to promote learning through free play.

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
		and develop. Planning specific goals to be reached for motor development can allow the teacher to adequately use equipment (Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008).	
Subthemes 3.1: *Indoor play*	In this study I found that preschool teachers want children to learn through hands-on experiences with enough space and play material indoors.	Planning an exciting indoor learning environment nurtures children's innate desire to learn (Koralek, 2004). According to Brooker, Blaise and Edwards (2014) children should be able to explore, examine, question, predict, test, investigate, trial, error, and manipulate during indoor play. Open-ended play material like wooden blocks and play dough encourages exploration through play (Frobose, 2008).	From preschool teachers' photos and narratives it was evident that they frequently used open-ended play material to encourage children's exploration and provoke their interest during indoor free play as is suggested by the literature.
Subtheme 3.2: *Outdoor play*	According to preschool teachers in this study children's safety during outdoor play is extremely important.	The outdoor learning environment consists of different surfaces. For example: smooth surfaces should be used for cycling and running (McInnes et al., 2011). Preschool teachers should consider which pieces of outdoor equipment are favoured among children as well as determine the logical time of day to play (when it is not too hot) on the different types of equipment (Sargisson & McLean, 2013). Risky play or motivated play, in which maximal experimentation and exploration of the environment is encouraged, usually associated with speed and height, is necessary for children to overcome fears as well as to explore and challenge themselves (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011; Little, Sandsetter & Wyver, 2012).	It is suggested by literature that children should take part in risky play in order to test their limits and overcome their fears. Though this type of play has developmental value to children, the preschool teachers in this study were wary to allow children to participate in risky play, because they feared for the children's safety and outraged parents. Planning the outdoor learning environment according to specific surfaces and equipment as indicated by literature was not something the teachers made reference to.

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
Theme 4: **Teachers' practices: strategies employed to enhance learning through play**	Preschool teachers try to be creative; enhance play by creating many playful situations; guide children to play through exploration; use play as a tool for learning; and encourage children to make their own choices during play.	The role of the teacher during children's play is to encourage children's play (Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010). When children play preschool teachers should focus on the process of play, elaborate on children's interests, reflect on children's emotions during play and try not to over stimulate the children (Koralek, 2004; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). In order to help children play to their full potential, preschool teachers should see play through the eyes of children and plan specific goals and outcomes (McInnes et al., 2011; Nicolopoulou et al., 2009).	The preschool teachers in this study mentioned a few strategies they employ to enhance learning through play. The literature reviewed suggests many more strategies which can be used to enhance learning through play (see section 2.4 Guidelines for implementing learning through play, in the literature review, on strategies to enhance learning through play).
Subtheme 4.1: *Curriculum*	There was a strong opinion voiced by the preschool teachers regarding the need for a curriculum to teach children between the ages of 3-5 years. Many preschool teachers try to simplify the outcomes of the CAPS Grade R curriculum for their pre Grade R children.	South Africa is currently unable to provide a preschool curriculum (Betty, Dawes & Biersteker, 2013) for children between the ages of 3-5 years.	Results from this study and literature reviewed with regard to a curriculum pre Grade R in South Africa point to a problem that needs to be addressed.
Subtheme 4.2: *The role of the teacher during play activities*	Preschool teachers believe that they play an important role in stimulating and encouraging children during play. Some preschool teachers believe that one has to get involved in children's play while others think it best not to interfere and disturb children's play.	According to Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2003) children should be supported by preschool teachers to actively learn and construct knowledge through play. Learning should be a mediated, guided and facilitated process between the teacher and the child where they engage with their own ideas while playing (Chaillé, 2008; Thomas,Warren & De Vries, 2011).	The results of this study in relation to the importance of a preschool teacher's role during children's play concur with the literature. It seems, however, that some preschool teachers are unsure of when to get involved, mediate and guide children's play.

Theme	Result	Literature	Interpretation and finding
Subtheme 4.3: *School context and teacher's play pedagogy*	It was found that the school context influenced preschool teachers' play pedagogy. Preschool teachers planned playful activities according to what was available at the school. Most preschool teachers expressed how they would like children to play more outdoors and be offered the opportunity to play more freely with less restriction.	The planning of learning opportunities with set developmental outcomes for children leads to optimal learning and development (Andiema, Kemboi & M'mbonne, 2013; Guddemi, Fite & Selva, 2013; Kangas, 2010). Preschool teachers' own beliefs of creating a rich learning environment, which incorporates learning through play, leads to children becoming individual decision makers and being responsible for their own learning (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011; Synodi, 2010; Walsh & Petty, 2007).	The results from this research study concur with the literature when considering how preschool teachers' school context and pedagogy impact children's play.

5.3.1   The relationship between information captured through data and literature

The table above made a basic comparison between the research results and the literature study as portrayed through the identified themes. An in-depth observation of the relationship between the data and the literature will now be discussed.

The personal background of what preschool teachers believed regarding learning through play revealed that they wanted learning to be a fun and a wonderful way for children to explore, discover and develop. This concurred with the literature (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Koralek, 2004; Ochiogu, 2013).

Coherence among preschool teachers about the difference in how they used to play as young children and how children play nowadays was found in this study. This finding concurs with the literature (Almon, 2004; Horsley & Penn, 2014). Sandberg & Samuelsson (2003) reveal reasons for the disruption or absence of children's learning through play include the planning of time for play, the influences of adults obscuring children's play and the role the media has on children's lives (Sandberg & Samuelsson, 2003). The preschool teachers who participated in my research study expressed similar concerns about why children do not learn as much through play as needed.

The literature regarding preschool teacher's training programmes (Botha, 2012; Berry et al., 2013) state that preschool teachers need quality training in order to educate young children. In this study many preschool teachers were convinced that their preschool teacher education programmes did not school them adequately to know what learning through play is and how it should be implemented.

In this study preschool teachers were convinced that their experiences and beliefs impact the way they teach young children. This concurred with the literature on play (Flottman, McKernan & Tayler, 2011; Walsh & Petty, 2007). This study also found that preschool teachers did not mention how they could address differences or contradictions between their own perceptions and others' by embracing the principles of quality learning experiences for children (Van Heerden, 2012; Walsh & Petty, 2007).

The preschool teachers in this study expressed that children's social environments are shaped largely by technology, including the internet, cell phones and electronic games. According to them children's social play reflect their everyday life experiences. The findings of this research study are similar to the findings mentioned in the literature (Becky, 2010; Fromberg & Bergen, 2015; Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

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The ways in which different types of play help to develop children's cognitive knowledge and skills are well reflected in both the literature Broadhead (2006); Clements (2004); Hirsh-Pasek, (2003); Ochiogu (2013) Smith and Pellegrini (2013); Van Heerden (2012) and the research results of this study.

According to the preschool teachers in this study, children develop best through different types of play if they feel emotionally safe and secure. Their emotional knowledge and skills can be observed during social play and interactions with others. The literature suggests that children should be exposed to a learning environment where they feel safe and their developmental needs, according to a Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), are met (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Brock et al. 2013; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005).

The physical development of knowledge and skills were in this study associated with children being active and developing fine and gross motor skills, body awareness, spatial awareness, coordination and balance. These types of play are referred to by literature as locomotor and motional play (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Below, in figure 5.1, children's development of physical knowledge and skills are presented in the pictures taken by the preschool teachers.

Figure 5.1: Children developing physical knowledge and skills through play

Having consulted the literature about learning through play in both indoor and outdoor play spaces (Little, Wyver & Gibson, 2011; McInnes et al., 2011; Sargisson & McLean, 2013), it is apparent that children need to learn and develop through both indoor and outdoor play. Also refer to section 2.4.3 in the literature review where the planning of the indoor and outdoor

learning environment is discussed. This is agreed upon by the literature and findings from the data of this research study and it suggests that children should explore, discover and engage in various types of play, including risky play, to develop the necessary skills.

The strategies preschool teachers used to enhance learning through play within their specific school contexts and play pedagogy were diverse. Some believed that children's play is enhanced by offering them a variety of toys and materials to play with. Others believed that children should play with real-life objects (when possible) to boost play. There were preschool teachers that were of the opinion that one should try to constantly create playful situations, while others believed children mostly create their own playful situations. The latter agrees with the literature (Gmitrova, Podhajecká & Gmitrov, 2009) on child-directed play where increased development of the different areas of the brain takes place due to child directed and child favoured play. The preschool teachers in this study mentioned a few strategies they use to enhance learning through play, but when the literature is reviewed there are many more strategies to be found (Heidemann, Hewitt & Hewitt, 2010; Koralek, 2004; Nicolopoulou et al., 2009). The literature (see sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4) suggests many strategies preschool teachers can use to enhance and implement learning through play. These strategies include how the learning environment could be planned to accommodate various types of play among children.

A mutual experience of dismay was discovered among the preschool teachers in this study in connection with the absence of a preschool curriculum and clear guidelines to educate children aged 3-5 years in South Africa. It was interesting to note that the preschool teachers often resorted to the help and guidance of the Grade R teachers or the Grade R curriculum when planning how children should learn through play. Another interesting finding of this study is that the preschool teachers have different perceptions as to what their role during children's play is. Some believe that they have to guide children's play, while others believe it best to allow the children to learn on their own through play. When consulting the literature (Chaillé, 2008) it seems that preschool teachers should at times become involved in children's play and guide them through facilitative interaction. Preschool teachers need to become aware of children's needs and interests (Ebrahim, 2014) by making use of active, guided participation (Thomas, Warren & De Vries, 2011) during children's play.

The school context and teachers' play pedagogy suggested that the way preschool teachers implement learning through play is influenced by the availability of a well structured learning environment and learning equipment. Preschool teachers wanted children to have more opportunity to play. The literature suggests that children's learning is influenced by how preschool teachers plan learning experiences according to what they have in their specific context and their specific needs (Andiema, Kemboi & M'mbonne, 2013; Guddemi, Fite & Selva, 2013; Kangas, 2010).

5.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study only included five participants and therefore generalizations to the wider population are difficult to make.

2. The data collection technique of receiving lesson plans could not be carried out by all the participants, as one head master did not approve of it.

3. Asking preschool teachers to do a photovoice including ten different lessons of children playing was a tall order considering they had limited time to do this.

5.5   ADDRESSING LIMITATIONS

1. Although the study only included five preschool teachers, these teachers were chosen from three different preschools, teaching children of different ages (3-5 years old). This assisted with addressing reliability and allowed pioneers to be identified in the research field of studying how preschool teachers in South Africa understand and implement learning through play.

2. It proved difficult to gather the lesson plans from two of the preschool teachers, but in gathering the other data collected by means of interviews, photovoices and field notes the drawback could be addressed. Another way in which this could be addressed would be to ask preschool teachers to write down what their interpretation of a lesson plan of learning through play is. This should then include how children learn cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills during play.

3. During the process of data collection there were many school holidays and public holidays. Collecting the photos from the preschool teachers proved more time consuming than initially planned. Adding to this, the preschool teachers took more than the required amount of photos of single playful experiences, resulting in even more time constraints. Addressing this aspect, I reassured the preschool teachers that if it proved too tedious to do 10 photovoices, they were welcome to do what they felt comfortable with. I also extended the time frame initially set for them to complete the photovoices. To further address this issue, one could ask preschool teachers to do only five photovoices, writing extended, detailed narrative reflections of the photos which represent how children learn through play.

5.6   ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.6.1   THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION WAS:
How do preschool teachers experience and understand the implementation of learning through play?

To address this research question the discussion is divided into preschool teachers' *experiences* of the implementation of learning through play and their *understanding* thereof.

❖ **Preschool teachers' experiences of learning through play**

It was established by the research results that preschool teachers had positive experiences playing as children and that this affected how they taught children. Through practical teaching experience, preschool teachers are able to witness the value of learning through play. Allowing children to develop through play and using it as a tool for learning was found to be valued by all the preschool teachers. The preschool teachers in this study mentioned that they were aware of the differences between their own and others' pedagogy of play. They argued that one's past and current experiences with play impact the way that you teach play to young children.

Teachers' training and personal experiences with play impact their play pedagogy. Concern is expressed by the preschool teachers because of the lack of a pre-Grade R preschool curriculum in South Africa. The lack of a preschool curriculum also causes preschool teachers to have limited guidelines to use when implementing learning through play.

❖ **Preschool teachers' understanding of learning through play**

The preschool teachers' understanding of play varied greatly. Their comprehension of play as a method of learning emphasised the theoretical and practical bases they employ during children's learning. The theoretical bases included preschool teacher education programmes and training. Although all but one preschool teacher valued teacher training and education programmes, it was found that some preschool teachers believed their teacher training lacked significance and substance. Most preschool teachers wanted their teacher education programmes, as well as government policies, to provide them with structure and guidance on understanding and implementing a curriculum that fosters learning through play. The preschool teachers believed their role during free play and structured play to be important. It was found that the preschool teachers aimed to allow children to learn through play, but were not sure whether they employed a teaching practice that fosters learning through play.

5.6.2   SUB-QUESTION 1

How do preschool teachers conceptualize and understand learning through play?

Preschool teachers were not only stimulated to look at their own conceptions and understandings of learning through play, but also at that of other preschool teachers. In this study the preschool teachers' conceptions and understandings of learning through play were embedded in their opinions, knowledge and experiences thereof. The results of this study (see Table 4.1) showed that the preschool teachers believe that children should learn

through play, but currently do not get enough opportunity to do so. To address this matter the following sub-headings are provided: teacher training and practical experience impacting their conceptions and understanding of learning through play; personal beliefs and convictions regarding how children learn through play; and preschool teachers' perceptions of free or structured play and learning.

❖ *Teacher training and practical experience impacting their conceptions and understanding of learning through play*

In table 4.1 the preschool teachers' personal information and backgrounds are presented. It should be noted that the teachers' training programmes as well as practical experience of teaching children vary greatly. One preschool teacher has a certificate in Early Childhood Development and 26 years of practical teaching experience; another teacher has a diploma in Early Childhood Development and 27 years of practical teaching experience; and the other three preschool teachers have degrees in Early Childhood Development with three, 13 and three years of practical teaching experience respectively. The preschool teacher who has a certificate in Early Childhood Development expressed that her understanding of learning through play was not so much enhanced through her teacher training than through her practical teaching experience of 26 years. The other preschool teachers believed that their teacher training had a positive impact on their teaching practices, but that it was not sufficient. They did not distinctively point to their years of practical teaching experience and the effect that it has had on them.

❖ **Personal beliefs and convictions regarding how children learn through play**

Two of the preschool teachers believed that children have to explore and actively engage in their learning experiences. Two others mentioned that play has to be a fun way for children to learn and discover. The last one argued that sensory play experiences are the best way for children to learn.

Their understanding about play and what impacts children's learning during play revealed the following: one preschool teacher believed that play is valuable to children's learning; another pointed to the importance of her own knowledge and beliefs in influencing how children play and learn; a third mentioned that children's traditions and culture impact their play and learning; the fourth teacher remarked that children's play and learning were positively impacted when she stimulated learning in a relaxed and fun way; and the last teacher believed it is important that children be offered as much opportunity as possible to learn by exploring and discovering during play.

❖ **Preschool teachers' perceptions of free play or structured play and learning**

Three of the five preschool teachers found that children are relaxed during free play and seem to accomplish developmental outcomes easier than in structured, teacher-directed circumstances. It was pointed out by all of the preschool teachers that the role of the teacher during children's free play and structured play is important. One preschool teacher motivates children during free play, but tries not to disturb them. Another believes that she positively influences children during play. Facilitating children's learning by setting realistic expectations for them during structured play encourages development, according to two of the preschool teachers. The other believes that preschool teachers should adapt to a child's level and have a strong relationship with them to know their needs during free or structured play.

5.6.3   SUB-QUESTION 2

Which guidelines do preschool teachers use when implementing learning through play?

Due to the lack of a preschool curriculum for children pre-Grade R in South Africa preschool teachers need to make use of other resources as guidelines. Many preschool teachers in this study explained that they consulted with other preschool teachers, especially Grade R teachers, when they needed guidance on implementing learning through play. There were also preschool teachers who tried to simplify the Grade R curriculum in order to establish the outcomes they believed relevant for children pre-Grade R. Some preschool teachers made use of learning material like books or the internet to plan playful learning experiences. The preschool teachers in this study expressed that they had limited guidelines. Three of the five preschool teachers in this study mentioned that that they wished they had a preschool curriculum for children pre-Grade R to use as a guideline and structure for implementing learning through play.

5.6.4   SUB-QUESTION 3

Which activities and/or strategies do preschool teachers apply to enhance learning through play?

All the preschool teachers had varied responses as to how they enhance learning through play. One preschool teacher explained that being creative and allowing children to be creative enhanced their play. Another preschool teacher believed that employing a teaching strategy where children play and are unaware that they learn during this process enhanced their play. The other preschool teachers had other methods to enhance learning through play. Strategies like creating fun, playful learning experiences for children were used by the preschool teachers in this study. Other strategies included the following: allowing children to

be creative; observing and studying children playing; teaching children how to play; and making them understand what they were achieving when they play. Some preschool teachers tried to make use of hands-on activities to allow children to learn through play. Others allowed children to make use of a variety of materials and learning media (often times new or unfamiliar to them) which caused them to be more interested in playing with it.

Some preschool teachers in this study were somewhat aware of their role as facilitator during children's play and knew how to assist children by encouraging play and assisting with active learning and knowledge construction. Other preschool teachers mentioned examples of how they got involved in children's play, helped children to extend their play by giving ideas and allowing children to learn things on their own according to their developmental level.

5.6.5 SUB-QUESTION 4

Which factors, if any, may influence the implementation of learning trough play?

The preschool teachers in this study could relate to many factors identified by the literature (see section 2.5) to influence learning through play. These factors are discussed below:

Factor 1

> The first factor discussed is preschool teachers acknowledging the importance of learning through play. It was found in this study that preschool teachers want children to be offered the opportunity to learn more through play, but the reality is that this does not always happen in preschools in South Africa.

Factor 2

> The second factor: preschool teacher education programmes, with the specific focus on preschool teachers' own education of learning through play, proved diverse. Some preschool teachers argued that they did not receive adequate training in educating children to learn through play. Another opinion was that teacher training in learning through play is ongoing and that more investment should be made to continuously train teachers in this regard. There was also a preschool teacher who believed that practical experience was more important than teacher training. Preschool teachers felt unable to implement learning through play without proper training and knowledge of what it means.

Factor 3

The lack of a curriculum and guidance pre-Grade R is the third factor. This study found that the most preschool teachers experienced despair due to the fact that they were not aware of official guidelines, or a curriculum, pre-Grade R to provide guidance on implementing learning through play for 3-5 year old children.

Factor 4

Preschool teachers' memories and current experiences of play constitute the fourth factor. The preschool teachers in this study demonstrated that they had joyous memories of playing as children. Many preschool teachers said that it was due to these memories that they themselves wanted to create joyous memories of play for children in their classrooms. It was found, however, that there were certain things that contributed to them being unable to provide children with playful opportunities. These included other teacher's opinions, fear for the children's safety as well as trying to satisfy the children's parents.

Factor 5

The fifth factor is providing a playful learning environment. This study explored how preschool teachers implement learning through play in indoors and outdoors learning environments. The preschool teachers did not express unease about the availability of space to play, but mentioned how they would like the children to play more freely indoors and outdoors. The teachers were concerned about the children's safety while playing in the different learning environments, especially outdoors.

Factor 6

The demands made by stakeholders, like parents, headmasters and other preschool teachers, is the sixth factor. The findings of this study indicate that preschool teachers often find themselves following teaching instructions given by headmasters and other preschool teachers. These teaching instructions do not always support learning through play. Preschool teachers experience uneasiness and difficulty balancing learning through play with pleasing the headmaster, other preschool teachers and parents.

5.7   FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this research study was to establish the level of preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. The findings of this study are significant since they reveal that preschool teachers in South Africa do not have substantial

guidelines or a preschool curriculum to implement learning through play for 3-5 year old children. The findings followed by the recommendations made are discussed below:

Finding 1: Need for a pre-Grade R curriculum

> There is a lack of structure and guidance from the South African Department of Education, due the lack of a pre-Grade R preschool curriculum.

Recommendation 1

> The Department of Education should create an awareness of what learning through play means and how it should be implemented. This can be addressed by providing clear guidelines, or a curriculum, for 3-5 year old children in South Africa.

Finding 2: Quality teacher education programmes

> The preschool teachers in this study believe that their education programmes and teacher training were not significant and substantial enough to know how to properly educate 3-5 year old children to learn through play.

Recommendation 2

> Preschool teachers need to be assisted and made competent in implementing learning through play as pedagogy. This can be done through providing quality teacher education programmes, continuous teacher training courses and seminars.

Finding 3: Parents' influence on how children learn

> In this study preschool teachers revealed that in trying to show regard for parents' opinions and prescriptions for how children should learn, learning through play is not always valued or regarded as an optimal way for children to learn.

Recommendation 3

> The parents should be made aware that young children between the ages of 3-5 years need to learn through various types of play.

Finding 4: Headmasters' and owners of preschools' influence on how children learn

> This study found that headmasters or owners of preschools sometimes direct children's learning through teacher-directed approaches instead of promoting learning through play to completely infiltrate each and every activity.

Recommendation 4

> The head masters or owners of preschools should know how and why children learn through play. They should help structure the daily school program, as well as indoor and outdoor play spaces, to enhance learning through play.

5.8   FURTHER RESEARCH OR STUDY

The following are suggestions for further research studies:

Suggestion 1

> A study on how parents believe children learn and develop through play.

Suggestion 2

> A study on how preschool education programmes could assist preschool teachers in applying learning through play as teaching practice.

Suggestion 3

> A study on headmasters of preschools: how to orchestrate learning for young children and how learning through play features during planning and execution.

Suggestion 4

> A study on the lack of a preschool curriculum for children pre-Grade R and how this impacts learning and development.

5.9   CONCLUSION

How preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play is a complex matter. It is not only their own beliefs, experiences and convictions that contribute to their application of learning through play, but also the school context, parents and headmasters/owners of preschools that impact how they implement learning through play. This study demonstrated that guidance in South Africa concerning the education of 3-5 years old children through play is restricted. Factors such as preschool teachers' acknowledgement of learning through play; preschool teacher education programmes; the lack of a curriculum and guidance pre-Grade R; preschool teachers' reminiscences and current experiences with play; playful learning environments; competent teachers; working conditions; demands set for teaching; children's engagement in play and play preferences; gender differences; and technology, the media and the social environment, all contribute to how and why preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play.

Despite the shortcomings and different factors that influence the implementation of learning through play, preschool teachers demonstrated and voiced favoured opinions and practices toward children learning through play.

5.10   FINAL THOUGHTS

I found this study to be an interesting and enriching experience. Gaining knowledge by reviewing literature and understanding preschool teachers' views and practices offered me the opportunity to reflect on my own teaching practice. The answers to the research questions as well as the findings of this research study caused me to constantly and critically focus on how I teach young children. The visual nature of the preschool teachers' photovoices allow readers of this research study to better understand and see learning through play through the eyes of the five preschool teachers. I believe that this study allows the reader to get a clear picture of how preschool teachers understand and implement learning through play.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Headmaster/Owner of school's letter of consent

APPENDIX B
Participants' letter of consent

APPENDIX C
Explanation of photo voice and narrative reflections

APPENDIX D
Individual semi-structured interview schedule 1

APPENDIX E
Individual semi-structured interview schedule 2

APPENDIX F
Letters to parents

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Dear headmaster and/or owner of the school,

I am a student, busy with my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. I am doing a study on preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. With your permission I would like to include preschool teachers from your preschool in this study. If you wish to grant me permission to do research at your school, I would please like to have a copy of your vision, mission or policy statement where you admit that learning through play is implemented in your preschool.

The purpose of this study is purely for research. I will not mention the name of your school or teachers taking part in this study. In regard to protecting the anonymity of your preschool and its teachers I will use pseudonyms. Two teachers from your preschool will be selected based on pre-determined criteria. One will be a teacher, who teaches 3-4 year old children and the other, a teacher who teaches 4-5 year old children.

The data will be collected as follow:

- Upon our first meeting, I will ask teachers to give me copies of 3 different lesson plans, which reflect learning through play.

- In March 2014 - May 2014, I will ask them to do a photovoice and narrative reflection. Please see Appendix C for more information in this regard.

- After they have done the photovoice and narrative reflection, I will conduct a 45 minute, semi-structured interview with them in June - July 2014, focusing on research questions applicable to my study.

- In August 2014, I will return again to do another 45 minute, semi-structured interview with them to discuss lesson plans as well as other research questions.

- I will make field notes in the form of a personal journal of my personal observations throughout the research process.

I would greatly appreciate your co-operation. Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature, purpose and procedures that will be followed during the research. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

1. I consent to allow preschool teachers from my preschool to participate in the above mentioned research study, I consent that samples may be collected from the following: teacher's photovoice, narrative reflections and individual semi-structured interviews.

2. I authorise the researcher to do research and collect data at my school, including field notes, the use of photovoice, narrative reflections, lesson plans and interviews for data analysis.

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Appendix B: Participant's letter of consent

Preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play

Name of participant:

Name of investigator: Mrs. K. Smit

Dear Preschool Teacher

I am a student doing my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. The purpose of my research study is to gain insight into preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play. With this letter I would like to invite you to take part in this study. If at any point during the research study you want to withdraw it is your right to do so and I will respect your decision.

The data will be collected as follows:

- Upon our first meeting I will ask you to provide me with copies of three different lesson plans which reflect learning through play. I will collect these copies from you within two weeks after our first meeting.

- During February/March 2014 - May 2014 I will ask you to do a photovoice and narrative reflection. Please refer to Appendix C for more information in this regard.

- After you have completed the photovoice and narrative reflection I will conduct a forty-five minute, semi-structured interview with you in June - July 2014, focusing on research questions applicable to my study.

- In August 2014 I will return again to do another forty-five minute, semi-structured interview with you and to discuss lesson plans as well as other research questions.

You are welcome to ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedure you are welcome to notify me. You will be given the opportunity to verify my expressed views and the transcriptions made of interviews. You need not fear for the safety or exposure of any children in your preschool as I will not use any data where children's faces can be identified.

I can assure you that you can trust me with the data I collect from you. I will safeguard the information you provide me with and the data collected from you will be kept confidential. I will not mention your name and will respect your privacy and anonymity by making use of a pseudonym or code name when referring to data collected from you.

Please sign to indicate full comprehension of the nature, purpose and procedures of the research and to give your consent to participate. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

1. I consent to participate in the above mentioned research study and I consent that samples may be collected from the following: my photovoice, my narrative reflections and the individual semi-structured interviews.

2. I authorise the use of photovoice, narrative reflections, documents and interviews for data analysis.

Appendix C:

Explanation of photo voice and narrative reflections

Designing a photovoice and writing a narrative reflection on photos by focusing on: your school's learning environment (indoors and outdoors), materials available for play and utilising the learning environment and materials to construct playful learning activities.

1. Designing a photovoice

Use the following guidelines to take photos:

- Photos taken should represent the way you plan and teach play learning activities.

- Both indoor and outdoor play spaces should be evident.

- Different types of activities should be reflected through your photos.

- Also try to take photos that represent ideas regarding play which can include: play as fun or hard work, naturally produced play, play as serious business, rules of play or playing fair.

- Pictures should represent different types of materials, including open-ended materials (these may include sandpits, stumps, wooden blocks etcetera).

- Pictures should also reflect strengths and concerns regarding learning through play.

Please do not take photos where children or the school where you teach can be identified.

2. Write a narrative reflection to explain the photos you have take

Use the following guidelines to write a narrative reflection:

- Explain how the photos you have taken represent the way you plan and teach playful learning activities.

- Explain what area was used (indoors or outdoors) and why.

- Describe what type of activity you photographed.

- Explain photos you have taken where you observed ideas regarding play including: play as fun or hard work, naturally produced play, play as serious business, rules of play or playing fair.

- Give an explanation of which materials you used to plan the lessons and why.

- Explain strengths and concerns.

Appendix D:

Individual semi-structured interview schedule 1

Interview questions/prompts (the questions are only guidelines and the researcher will be guided by the photovoice and narrative reflection)

This individual semi-structured interview was used in June - July 2014 after teachers have done the photo voice and narrative reflections (taking pictures of their school's learning environment and materials available to support learning through play).

- What comes to mind when you think about learning through play in South Africa?

- Are you aware of any policies or documents released by the South African Department of Education that explain how young children should be educated in South Africa?

- How do you feel about this?

- What kind of impact, if any, do you think learning through play has on children?

- How do you think learning through play could assist children in the development of skills like leadership skills, creative skills, problem solving skills, social skills and so forth?

- Do you know the term Developmentally Appropriate Practice? What do you understand under the term DAP?

- I will now present you with the points of interest relating to learning through play and DAP. Then I would like to ask you what your opinion of each of the following is:

  o What do you think about emphasis being placed on interactional relationships between children and adults?

  o What comes to mind when you think of the encouragement of play-based, first hand, exploratory experiences being provided?

  o What do you think about provision being made for children to self-manage and self-direct their learning?

  o Do you think that collaborative, peer group learning takes place in the age group you teach?

  o What do you think about the role of the teacher being to facilitate and support learning?

- o What comes to mind when you think of early disciplinary and prescriptive methods of instruction being discouraged (meaning do you agree or disagree with a teaching practice that focuses on rigid, disciplinary education)?

- o What comes to mind when you think about the classroom environment encouraging children to listen to and read stories, dictate stories and engage in dramatic play? This question aims to elicit your thoughts on children's creative thinking and play in the classroom.

- o Do you think that teachers should use activities like block building and measuring ingredients for cooking to help children learn concepts about maths and science?

- o What do you think about children having daily opportunities to use pegboards, puzzles, legos, etc. as they choose? With this question I would like to gather your thoughts on children playing with educational toys as indicated and whether you think they should be able to choose when and if they want to play with these toys or not.

- o What comes to mind when you think about the sound of the environment being neither harsh, nor too quiet?

- o The sound of the environment is marked by pleasant conversation, laughter and excitement due to playful experiences. What do you think about this?

- o What do you think about children being physically active in the classroom? This question aims to hear your thoughts on whether or not children should play games, requiring them to be physically active in the classroom, or do you think that they should not be physically active in the classroom and why.

- o What do you think of children being presented with concrete, three dimensional learning activities, related to their daily life-experiences?

- How did you experience the process of doing the photo voice and narrative reflections?

- Do you think that your photo voice reflects development of skills for example language skills, mathematic skills and social skills?

Appendix E:

Individual semi-structured interview schedule 2

Interview questions/prompts (the questions are only guidelines and the researcher will be guided by teachers' lesson plans and the documents they use as guidelines for play)

This individual semi-structured interview was used in August 2014 after the lesson plans and documents teachers use for implementing learning through play have been collected.

- Which guidelines or materials do you use to do lesson planning?

- How do you think learning through play is reflected in your lesson plans?

- Which strategies or activities do you use to enhance learning through play?

- How can you assist children during play activities (free play and planned play activities)?

- I do you think about the following ideas regarding play:

  o What comes to mind when you think of play as learning?

  o What do you think about play as fun versus play as hard work? With this question I would like to hear your opinion on children's play and whether it is only for fun, but also when they are busy with activities which they may perceive as "hard work".

  o What comes to mind when you think about children's natural way of playing?

  o What is your opinion of play as serious business (meaning that children play with reason or toward a specific goal)?

  o What do you think about rules of/for play?

  o What is your opinion of playing fair (social interaction)?

- How do you think teachers can help to scaffold children's learning, meaning to build on their learning experiences and construction of thoughts and ideas, through play?

- What memories do you have regarding your own playful experiences as child within a preschool setting?

- Do you think these memories influence the way in which you implement learning through play and if so, in what way?

- Do you have an opinion on how children used to play in the past versus how they play nowadays?

- What is your own personal philosophy (theory, belief or conviction) regarding learning through play and what do you think influenced this?

- Do you think children play a part in their own learning process and if so, how would you include them and show regard for their ideas in their learning process?

- I would like you to elaborate on and give me your opinion of the following:

  o Do you think that teachers' own knowledge or beliefs regarding learning through play influences the implementation thereof and if so, how?

  o How could teacher education programmes impact the implementation of learning through play?

  o What is your opinion of the influence of the learning environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces, and play equipment on learning through play?

  o Do you think all teachers have the same beliefs and knowledge about play?

  o Do you think the learner-teacher ratio could impact learning through play and if so, how?

  o What comes to mind when you think about demands being set by stakeholders like headmasters, head of departments, parents, etc. regarding children's learning?

- If you had the power to control how children are taught and how learning through play could be implemented in South Africa, what would be your ideal?

Preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play

Name of investigator: Mrs. K. Smit

Dear Parents

I am a student doing my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. The purpose of my research study is to gain insight into preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play.

I have invited preschool teachers from the school your child attends to take part in my research study. To obtain the necessary data for my studies I have asked teachers to do a photovoice. This entails taking pictures of the school's learning environment, as well as some of the learning activities teachers employ throughout the school day. I have asked teachers to only take pictures that represent play learning activities. I can assure you that no photos where your child's face or the identity of the school can be recognized will be used for research purposes. It might however occur that a child's hand, their back, the back of their head/hair, etc., might be photographed in the process of collecting data. Your child will not form part of the study, as my investigation is focused on preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of learning through play.

It would be much appreciated if you would give your consent to allow teachers to photograph your child participating in playful learning activities, in a way that is non-recognizable. Please sign this letter, indicating full awareness of the nature of your child's role in the data collection process.

You are welcome to email me, should you have any queries with regard to the research study.

Kind regards

Karen Smit

Email address: krnbasson@gmail.com