

Early Childhood Educators' Constructions of Play Beliefs and Practice

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Abstract

This qualitative study was designed to explore the constructions of Early Childhood Educators' (ECE) beliefs about play and how they translate these beliefs into practice. Guided by a teachers' beliefs framework (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Haney & McArthur, 2001; Richards & Lockheart, 1994; Pajares, 1992) and a constructivist philosophical lens, the study sought to identify (a) ECE educators' beliefs about play, (b) how the educators practice play, and (c) how they incorporate both theoretical and practical components of play beliefs into the early childhood education classroom. A postmodern orientation and rigorous qualitative research methods were employed. Data were collected in three phases: an in-depth open-ended interview was conducted, followed by classroom observation over the course of 6 weeks, and finally a second interview was conducted using the process of Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) with four purposefully selected participants. The interview data were transcribed and categories were co-constructed with the participants. Findings revealed that the educators came into their training programs with certain core beliefs about play that were developed in pre-service experience (upbringing, culture, childhood memories). These core beliefs played an important role in the information that these educators were able to filter into their previous beliefs about play. Further, the educators' beliefs about play appeared to be reinforced and even magnified through their training programs, as they were able to take specific techniques and approaches and apply them in their practice. Two of the educators had previous experience working in daycare, hence facilitating the application of new knowledge to their pre-existing beliefs. The study findings add to a small growing body of research that furthers our understanding of the construction of early childhood educator beliefs. This research also helps us understand how educators' pre-service and in-service experience contributes to the development of play beliefs and helps in the transfer of beliefs into practice. In addition, the findings give a voice

to the early childhood educators, making a valuable contribution to the literature.

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Chapter I: Autobiographical Prologue

I have evolved over the course of the past several years as a researcher, and as a person. This evolution is due in part to the education I have pursued; in particular my research methodology courses, as well as my experience working alongside my colleagues in the early childhood field. Through these experiences, I have become much more in tune with my role as a researcher and the influence I have on the participants during the research process. As well, I have learned a few things about myself, who I am and what I believe in; namely, the role play serves in the development of the overall child. In order to be transparent about my own beliefs regarding play and to help the readers evaluate the trustworthiness of this study I have included an autobiographical prologue.

This autobiographical section is twofold: first, I wish to share my childhood and experiences that have led to my passion for play and experience in the field of education; and second, I will address the link between my training and my topic.

Link Between Childhood and Play

By explaining my early experiences with play (as a child and later as an educator) this will lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the links I draw between childhood and play. I grew up in a very small town in the Eastern Townships, Québec approximately 130 km east of Montreal. I am the eldest of two girls, four years the senior of my baby sister. My mother was a kindergarten/grade one teacher for over 30 years. My father is in the Propane business and was often travelling for employment purposes leaving us in the very capable hands of my mother. Since my mother was a trained teacher she most certainly influenced the choices I made in life, as well as in my career. My mother always ensured that we relished our childhood experiences... giving us every opportunity to appreciate the world around us through play.

With this said, being the child of a teacher you can imagine that we spent a fair amount of time learning about nature. We often could be seen playing outdoors (i.e., sliding in the winter, snowball fights, playing in the sand, playing tag, etc.). We had lots of space for playing and exploring nature and our surroundings. Play was a natural form of life for children in my neighbourhood as they could be seen playing throughout the day. I have fond memories of playing outdoors with friends after school, exploring the best nature had to offer. Sometimes we would try and dig little gold nuggets out of the asphalt to collect for our imaginary travels to lands far away. As children, we were free to explore, free to chase our dreams, and free to test our hunches.

In addition to my life long love of play, I have always been very fond of children. I would often accompany my mom as an adolescent to her kindergarten class on my days off (end of year exams) to learn more about the field of education. I was totally immersed in this experience of teaching, learning and playing with the children and I loved every minute of it. I believe that my memories of childhood play coupled with my experiences working side-by-side with my mom and the children reinforced my career direction in early childhood education.

Research Training and Play

I now wish to address my vested interest in this research topic. I will first address my scholarly pursuits, followed by my academic experiences, and finally the topic itself of “Early Childhood Educators’ Constructions of Play Theories and Practice.”

Following my calling and life dream, I decided to pursue a four year Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Concordia University in Montreal, Québec. While completing this degree, I worked in various daycare settings in the greater metropolitan area of Montreal with children between 18-months and five-years of age. One of the most fascinating experiences that I witnessed was the educators’ constant adaptation

of activities to meet the children's needs and desires. They were always observing the children's play and trying to accommodate their needs by introducing new activities, toys, and games. Many of these educators truly believed in the role of play and tried to reinforce it in their own classrooms.

Whereas I was struck by the commitment of some educators to the process of play, I also encountered many who resisted it. In fact, I worked with a daycare co-educator who disagreed with play as a vehicle for learning. She believed in a more traditional approach, a teacher-directed approach to learning. This approach goes against the philosophy of facilitating the children's interests and abilities as they play. During this year I endured carbon copy cut-outs of perfectly tailored art work that my co-educator (or partner) believed demonstrated the children's knowledge. Again, these perfectly tailored pigs or cows did not reflect the children's play interests nor were they initiated by the children's own curiosities (going against a play-based approach to learning). Although not all educators exhibited a commitment to play process, I witnessed the remarkable learning that took place in environments where educators created space for children to discover the world through play. It was these remarkable experiences that really pushed me towards my research topic focused on educators' beliefs about play and the influence of those understandings on their practice.

I taught in elementary school in various capacities from kindergarten to grade six for a few years. As an elementary teacher and a play advocate I ensured that the children had the opportunity for play throughout the day (indoors/out likewise). I had always learned in my courses and life experiences that play served an extremely pivotal role in the development of the "whole" child. Therefore, when I arrived in my kindergarten class of course I ensured that the children spent the majority of the day playing. I set up various learning centers that would help develop the children's skills in all domains (social-emotional, cognitive, language, physical) and then let them explore. This was in-line with current research on the

benefits of play (Bodrova & Leong, 2003), as well as my training in education. When the children were ready to move onto a new area or concept, I provided them with the materials and time to do so. This approach to learning was met with some questioning by my colleagues who did not always believe that play should serve as a primary vehicle for learning and development.

My colleagues and I had numerous discussions on beliefs about play and the potential benefits that play addresses in the child's overall development. In fact, many of my colleagues expressed a shared desire and passion for play, however chose not to implement it into the classroom (citing time and curriculum demands as part of the reasons). Others argued that play should be reserved for certain time periods in the day. I continued to plead my case that children learn best through play and tried to cite all the research that I had read in my undergraduate degree (i.e., Sutton-Smith, 1997; Van Hoorn, Scales, Monighan Nourot & Alward, 1999). I struggled with the difference in play approaches and implementation (or lack of implementation) amongst the staff. I tried to understand why some educators believed in play but didn't implement it into the curriculum. Play was advocated through Québec policy (Ministère de la Famille et Aînés, 1997, 2007) as a key vehicle for overall development and supported by national research but still was not practiced universally. It seemed to me that perhaps it was the educators themselves who were creating a gap between play policy and play implementation? The educators for some reason were making decisions about whether or not to implement play in their classrooms, and to what degree. It appeared to me that in order to fully understand these discrepancies about educators' beliefs (and translation of those beliefs into classroom) I needed to delve further into the research on and the practice of play. This created a desire for me to really understand how educators develop their understandings about play and how these are put into practice? Why do some educators believe fervently in the benefits of play and incorporate it daily while others do not? I also

felt this research would prove to be a useful addition to the knowledge base on play beliefs and practice and help to address this apparent gap between beliefs and practice.

As a daycare educator and an elementary teacher, I witnessed a decline in planned and spontaneous play periods over a number of years. I began to wonder why play was receiving such little attention? Why were certain forms of play preferred over others? What were the educators' experiences with play? These wonderings led me to go back to school and challenge myself by pursuing a Master's degree in Child Study at Concordia University in Montreal, Québec. I wanted to indulge myself in the current research and theory surrounding play and make sure I had all the latest information on play to ensure I was making informed decisions.

During my Master's degree, I maintained a vested interest in the topic of "play." My thesis was entitled "Superhero Toys and Boys' Physically Active and Imaginative Play." My research showed that superhero toys did not elicit aggressive or violent behaviour; on the contrary they seemed to move the play scenario forward. The 56 boys that participated in my study demonstrated that they were able to create their own roles and themes in play with the use of superhero toys. This finding fascinated me and reinforced my conviction that play could serve as a vehicle for learning and development for children at any age.

My experiences as a daycare, elementary and college teacher have pushed me towards investigating how early childhood educators construct play beliefs and how they practice these beliefs in the classroom. This angle in particular is of interest because I have witnessed such a difference between educators in their play beliefs and practices. Some reinforce play with great conviction and others choose to focus on structured teacher-directed activities and learning. As a teacher, I have witnessed a decline in play in the daycare and elementary classrooms, as well as a lack of congruity between educators' reported beliefs and practice. Did these educators not receive play courses and training? What play beliefs

do educators adhere to if any? What are their personal beliefs about play? How do they carry their beliefs forward into the classroom? Do the educators remember learning any specific play theories in their training programs? Research suggests the benefits of play in the early years for the child's overall healthy development; so why are the practices not consistent? Policies in Québec advocate for play as being at the heart of curriculum, so why are there discrepancies?

These experiences and questions led me to pursue my doctorate in Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. I wanted to be involved in the research process with early childhood educators: trying to make sense of their experiences with play, understanding what training if any they had in play, and elucidating how they made the connection between training and classroom practice. Being a student, an educator and also a college instructor, I believed that I could relate to my participants since I also went through a similar process in my training. I could understand the lingo involved in early childhood education; I understood the different developmental theorists, the play theories and the challenges involved in bridging the gap between play theory and practice. My own experiences facing adversity with the entire concept of play as a learning vehicle placed me in a position where I could see things from multiple perspectives. All of these personal experiences and factors are what led me to pursue the research topic at hand.

As this research was conducted in Québec, I will give you a brief overview of the educational system, and explain the two strands of schooling in Early Childhood Education.

Practical Considerations: Québec Policy

I have chosen to share a brief description of the province's educational mandate with the readers as well as a brief description of the two tracks of training programs available (Diplome D'Études Collégial and Attestation in ECE). In Canada, each province is responsible for their own educational policies and mandates. In order to understand Québec's

early childhood curriculum and early childhood training, it is important to share the policy with the readers.

Despite ongoing pressure to substitute play with academic activities during the preschool years—a mandate prevalent in both popular culture and certain academic circles—the Government of Québec continues to maintain a strongly pro-play mandate for its early childhood education and care programs. The Québec Policy adopted in 1997 (Ministère de la Famille et Aînés) and later revised in 2007 puts a premium on play in preschool education programs. This service is offered and coordinated by an organization known in French as Centre de la Petite Enfance (CPE) and in English as the Early Childhood and Childcare Agency (ECCA). The program is promoted by the government and implemented based on several guidelines: most significant to this study is that children learn by playing. Play activities lie at the heart of the CPE's educational strategies (Ministère de la Famille et Aînés, 1997, 2007).

The Québec policy outlines that play is a vehicle for learning and exploration and has mandated that educators follow a play-based curricula. With this in mind educators are encouraged to follow the lead of the children in choosing play materials that will help support each child's overall development. The physical environment is also part of the play-based learning mandate; educators are expected to set up the environment in ways that will promote autonomy and enable the children to learn through play.

In the following section, I will identify and explain the ECE training programs available in Québec. I will briefly describe the two tracks that students may choose to follow: (1) Attestation (AEC) in ECE, or (2) Diplôme D'Etudes Collegiales (DEC) in ECE.

Description of Attestation (AEC) in ECE. The attestation program was designed for students who have completed high school and/or another college degree and who wish to complete a certificate in Early Childhood Education. Typically the majority of students

enrolled in the Attestation program come from a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and have immigrated to Québec from other countries to pursue their studies. These students on average are between the ages of 25 and 50-years of age.

The program can be completed on a full-time (one-year intensive) or a part-time basis while the students continue to work in the day and go to school in the evening. If the students have already completed at least three years of full time work in a recognized childcare establishment they will be qualified when they complete the Attestation program. However, if they do not have the required number of hours in the field, they will need to complete these hours before they are considered qualified by the Ministère de Famille et Aînés.

The Attestation program is set up in four semesters with very specific courses that the students must follow in a systematic order. The ministry controls the structure of this program and students must meet various outlined competencies. The students have two fieldwork placements to complete. The first placement is completed in the second semester, once the students have completed the health and safety courses and they attend their placement one day per week (7 contact hours a day with the children) over the course of 15 weeks. The second fieldwork placement is completed in the fourth and final semester, when students attend fieldwork two days a week for a minimum of 7 hours per day over the course of 15 weeks.

The Attestation program no longer provides any specific 'Play' course for their students as a result of a decline in government funding. Typically, the students learn about play through a myriad of courses (i.e., in their activities for 0-2, 3-5 and school age courses; among others). The Play course was removed from the Attestation program by the government over 15 years ago, in order to revamp the program to reduce the number of course hours (due to government cut backs). Therefore, since the Play course has been

removed, the educators must ensure that the students learn about play in the remaining courses.

Description of Diplome D'Études Collégial (DEC) in ECE. The DEC program is designed for students who have completed high school and go directly into CEGEP to follow a particular career path (it is considered to be a Technologies or Techniques program). The students enrolled in the DEC typically are young students between the ages of 17 and 25 years of age. The students also come from a variety of cultural backgrounds with the majority being Canadian born citizens. The program is set up in a fashion where the students can complete their DEC in three years as full-time students. Once the students finish their 3-year degree they are given a diploma in Early Childhood Education and may commence working full time in an early childhood setting as a qualified educator. The structure of the program is controlled by the Ministry based on specific outlined competencies.

The students who are enrolled in the 3-year DEC have three fieldwork placements to complete and many more hours on site than the Attestation students. The first fieldwork placement is one day per week over 15 weeks with a minimum of 7 contact hours with the children per day. The second fieldwork placement is two days a week for 15 weeks with 7 contact hours per day. The third and final placement is intensive; the students take over responsibilities in the classroom and attend fieldwork for eight consecutive weeks from Tuesday to Friday (four days of placement per week 7 contact hours per day).

The DEC students must also follow a prescribed timeline and course schedule. Among many other courses, the DEC students must complete a 45-hour 'Play Development in Early Childhood' course in semester two of their program. The competencies (elements of competence) outlined by the Ministry for this course do not refer to play itself as a subject, but instead focus on learning how to observe and extend the children's learning and

understanding. The statement of competence for this course outlined by the Ministry is:

(0192) “To assess a child’s needs with respect to his or her overall development.”

The course description from an English speaking College in the province of Québec is as follows: “Students will use an analysis of child development to support play in an early childhood context. Students will gain knowledge and intervention skills which facilitate the use of play as a means of enhancing development in young children.” This course is theory related with emphasis placed on: learning the stages of development, subcategories of play, types of play (i.e., types of social play), an introduction to classical and modern theories of play, as well as making connections between the seminal theorists (i.e., Piaget, Vygotsky) and the implications for play. In the Play course the students learn about play through video observations of children in ECE classrooms. The students learn how to: identify the types of play the children are engaged in, identify the level of play, identify the developmental areas the play supports, and learn how to adapt activities to support the children’s various needs and abilities.

In the following section, I will outline the purpose of this study.

Purpose of the Study

Shulman (1986) suggests that carefully designed research studies of how educators’ thinking and beliefs guide practice can improve the basic design of education programs. Current literature provides very little information about early childhood educators’ play beliefs and how they are practiced in ECE classrooms in Canada. The research done to date focuses on educators’ beliefs and knowledge in the United States and Europe (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosely & Fleege, 1993; Pajares, 1992; Vartuli, 1999; Fang, 1996; Nespor, 1987; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). While this information is certainly pertinent, it is limited and does not reflect the Canadian context. More research needs to be done to

understand how the educators working in Canada have come to develop beliefs about play and how they are transferred into the classroom.

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a better understanding of how ECE educators develop beliefs about play and how these beliefs are later translated into their classroom practice. the relationship between these and their implementation of play in the classroom. My hope is that the findings will inform policy and curricula. Most importantly, I am trying to understand how ECE educators' play beliefs are constructed and how they translate these beliefs to the actual classroom. Research on educators' beliefs and practice suggest that philosophical belief systems do guide educators' expectations about child development and guide the activities that they in turn promote (Fang, 1996; Vartuli, 1999). However, there appears to be some discrepancy between educators' espoused beliefs about play and their actual classroom practice (Ryu & Tegano, 2003). Since the educators themselves make the final decision regarding the types, amount and provisions for play in their own classrooms, understanding how they have come to develop play beliefs and how they implement these beliefs into the classroom may be useful in addressing the apparent gap between espoused beliefs and actual practice.

This research also provides general information to the education field at large. Information on educators' beliefs may lead to changes in how play is advocated in the classroom and may impact policy makers as they develop early childhood curricula.

Finally, a secondary objective of this research is to contribute to the educators' learning because it enables them to become much more aware of their role in the development of play beliefs in the ECE classroom.

Outline of this Dissertation

The first chapter of this dissertation provides an introductory autobiography explaining the personal experiences and beliefs which have led me to pursue this particular

research topic. As well, a brief description of the early childhood programs available in Québec is provided. Finally, the purpose of the research study is outlined.

The second chapter reviews the literature related to this program of research. It begins with an introduction to the current research on play. A literature review on specific research topics follows: cited reasons for the decline in play, as well as educators' beliefs and barriers to play are included in this review, and a discussion on praxis. The chapter concludes with the research questions and sub questions used in this study.

The third chapter introduces the conceptual framework centred on teacher beliefs' and informed by a constructivist perspective.

The fourth chapter is devoted to methodology. After a detailed account of the methodological approach and the steps followed, the chapter discusses data collection, data analysis and representation, and my own role management as a researcher. The role of trustworthiness is also addressed in the chapter.

Chapters five to eight present the cases, comprising four individual case studies of early childhood educators' play beliefs and practice. Each case study includes an introduction, and presentation of the themes specific to each educator. Chapter nine is a cross-case analysis and discussion examining differences and similarities among the four cases and including an interpretation of the results. The tenth and final chapter discusses final thoughts, limitations of the research and future directions.

Chapter II-Literature Review

Chapter two will include a review of the literature outlining the purpose of play, research on the value of play, research indicating a decline in early childhood play practice, theory into practice (praxis), research on the educators' beliefs about play, and finally the research questions.

Educators' perspectives on play and its value in an early childhood setting are in part influenced by their teacher preparation and by their own personal beliefs and philosophies about play (Silva & Johnson, 1999). Depending on the program the educator attended either a 3 year DEC college program, 1 year intensive college Attestation or a 4 year Bachelor's teacher training program in University in ECEE, the focus on early childhood education especially from birth to age 8 will differ significantly. An important element in teacher training has to do with understanding what play is, what it isn't and what it encompasses. Since play is an ambiguous term used in the academic field, it is important to describe play primarily before we look at research done to date on the value of play. We will begin by briefly looking at play from first the child's perspective, the parent, and finally the researchers and practitioners.

What is Play?

From a child's perspective play can be described in many ways such as nonliteral, intrinsically motivated, process over product, free choice, and positive affect (as described by Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). From a parents' perspective play is a child's livelihood, it is how a child spends their days in early life. However, in later childhood, play seems to shift towards more serious work and team sports (Rivkin, 2000).

Play is described by several researchers and practitioners alike (Brewer & Kief, 1997; Garvey, 1977; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983) by a small number of factors, such as positive affect, nonliterality, intrinsic motivation, process orientation, and free choice.

Positive affect is characterized by these researchers as a state that is enjoyable and fun, typically associated with laughter and smiles. Even when the child is insecure in the play and may show signs of fear, there is still a pleasurable quality to the play (i.e., climbing the jungle gym for the first time) (Smith, 1988). Nonliterality is often characterized by an as-if stance in the child's play that allows them to escape from reality to experiment with new possibilities (i.e., the usual meanings of objects, a rock can be substituted as a phone in the play). Intrinsic motivation comes from within the child, and play is pursued based on the child's internal drive and interests. Process orientation involves the child's play oriented towards the actual activity, rather than the end result (i.e., the play with blocks is far more important than the end result of the castle). Free choice is important for a child; when a child is able to choose their own activity they will consider this to be "play." When the adult chooses the activity, from a child's perspective this has now become work.

In the field of early childhood education (ECE), there is an ongoing debate whether play is to be distinguished from work, or is in effect a form of work (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Sutton-Smith (1997) aptly describes the difference between work and play here "Play is what the body wants to do, work is what the body is obliged to do" (p. 34). On the one hand, Maria Montessori (1964) defined play as "...the child's work" (p. 53), suggesting that play and work are synonymous. However, Elkind (2001) takes a different perspective arguing that play is not the opposite of work. He explains that play and work are complimentary parts of an adaptational process, requiring two parts: assimilation (play) and accommodation (work). Elkind (2001) believes that in some scenarios children's play precedes work (trying to master a difficult emotional situation), sometimes work precedes play (expression of their mastery), and sometimes play and work can occur simultaneously (i.e. games with rules). An example of a child involved in both work and play is a child working at understanding how to stack rings, once this has happened they then can use these rings in their dramatic play to

symbolize a donut or another item, thus extending the play). This distinction between what characterizes work and play is important in the field of ECE, as this may influence how an educator develops an understanding of play and work.

Play is a human phenomenon that occurs across the life span and impacts the overall development of the child. Young children can be observed playing as they explore the world around them and develop practice skills (Roskos & Christie, 2002). Children play in different contexts with different materials and resources—from pots and pans to more sophisticated technologies such as the IPAD or IPOD (Brown, Higgins, & Hartley, 2001). Children's play stems from the creative synergy of the moment and it is shaped by the here and now, and notions accrued from past experience (Roskos & Christie, 2002). Play is a behaviour that sustains the healthy development of the individual and the larger sociocultural fabric of society and reflects the contexts in which the child lives (e.g., home, daycare, community and the larger society) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Steglin, 2005).

Play is a dynamic knowledge system that fluctuates at the edge of children's capabilities. Children make use of 'tacit' knowledge in play; children often know much more than they are able to express about what they are doing (Polanyi, 1967). Children explore through the manipulation of objects, toys, and a variety of other materials provided to them and this exploratory nature of play often precedes the actual focused play behaviour (Hampshire Play Policy Forum, 2002). Play happens in, as Vygotsky (1967) so aptly observed, a zone of proximal development (ZPD) where children try to move beyond their everyday behaviours. Through various play experiences, children are able to test out hunches, solve problems, and move beyond their current level of processing. Stimulating play environments can facilitate progress to higher levels of thought throughout childhood.

Carlsson-Paige and Levin (1987) suggest that "play is the primary vehicle through which children work on developmental issues" (p. 67). Play may serve beneficial purposes

such as providing children with opportunities for exploration, interaction with others, a means of controlling and expressing emotions and developing skills to solve problems (Berk, 1994). Through play, children are provided with opportunities for social development as they learn to share materials with playmates, join play groups, and solve conflicts. Play is considered vital to children's physical development, as it helps build fundamental fine motor skills such as jumping, throwing, and climbing (Bredekamp & Kopple, 1997). Active physical play leads to optimal outcomes for young children as it enables them to develop small and large muscles refining eye-hand coordination, stability, and reflexes (Stegelin, 2005).

Educators are introduced to the various conceptions of what constitutes play and how it can be supported through their training, as well as through lived experiences. As educators' beliefs are thought to be learned through a combination of lived experiences including personal history, memories, and training (Anning, 1991; Conners, 1978; Shulman, 1986), it is imperative that the educator have a background knowledge on what actually constitutes play and its role in the early childhood classroom and beyond. By asking an ECE educator to reflect on their own play beliefs and how they transform these beliefs into practice is an important exercise in this research study.

In an effort to increase understanding about educators' beliefs about play, it is important to review the following literature: (1) research indicating a decrease in ECE play practice, (2) research related to theory into practice (praxis), and (3) research conducted on educators' beliefs.

In the following section I will outline three potential barriers to play cited in educational research, which may in turn impact educators' choices about incorporating play in the classroom, as well as effect their own beliefs about play and how they practice these beliefs in the classroom. These barriers are significant to mention, as they may help explain

why there appears to be a change in the types and amount of play being incorporated into early childhood settings.

Research Indicating a Decrease in ECE Play Practice

Despite research literature and government policy (cf. “Québec Family Policy and Childcare”, Ministère des Familles et Aînés, 1997, 2007), which advocates play as an effective learning tool, there appears to be a decrease in the amount of play in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) classroom (Kemple, 1996; Klugman & Smilansky, 1990; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2005). Despite this play-based mandate, research indicates that many forces run counter to the play movement, citing educators’ beliefs as one of the challenges, along with requests for accelerated academic requirements at earlier ages, lack of materials, and lack of time for play in ECE classrooms (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Jones & Cooper, 2006; Lehrer, Quance, Stathopoulos, & Petrakos, 2007; Shipley, 2008; Stegelin, 2005).

According to Kagan (1990), there appear to be three frequently cited barriers that prevent play in early childhood classrooms: (1) attitudinal, (2) structural, (3) and functional. These barriers are important to present in the literature review as they may help explain why some educators’ beliefs may be at odds with their practice.

Attitudinal barriers. Research indicates that one of the greatest impacts on play is parents’, society’s, and educators’ *attitudes* towards play (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999, 2005). The focus of some parents appears to be on the productiveness of the child: consequently, play is sometimes offered as a reward once academic work is complete (Stipek & Byler, 1997). As a result, some ECE programs are increasingly leaning towards didactic learning and leaving behind the spontaneous nature of play (Jones & Cooper, 2006; Stegelin, 2005; Stipek & Byler, 1997). In response to this growing pressure for young children (2-8 years) to learn formalized academics (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Klugman & Smilansky,

1990; Vartuli, 1999), ECE educators often are discouraged from incorporating play into the classroom learning experiences.

Recent research on brain development has strengthened the position that early academic instruction is critical at an early age (Zwillich, 2001). Current research has negated previously held beliefs that infants are born with a fully developed brain (Shore, 1997). The understanding now is that the brain does a great deal more developing in the first three years of life than previously known (Morrison, 2004; Shore, 1997; Zwillich, 2001). As a result, some parents have begun to stimulate children's intelligence during these critical, formal years of life (Zwillich, 2001).

Parental attitudes play an important role in defining what type of childhood a child will have. Parents who believe in the critical importance of having their child succeed may push towards early academic programs where play may not be an important element (Morrison, 2004). Hence, parental attitudes appear to play a role in the decrease of play in early childhood programs.

In addition to parental attitudes towards play, the decline in the practice of play in ECE classrooms may also be tied to a complexity of findings related to educators' attitudes (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Cruickshank, 1990; Elbaz, 1983). Charlesworth and her colleagues (1991) have suggested that strong beliefs can also impact the teacher's belief-action relationship. These researchers assert that when educators with extreme views (i.e., child-directed or teacher-directed) are chosen to participate in studies there may in fact be a very strong relationship between expressed beliefs and actual practice. Hence, if the teacher has been educated with a strong theoretical background there may be a tendency to find greater consistency between beliefs and practices (Anning, 1991; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Connors, 1978). However, when participants are included in studies without firm beliefs and theoretical frameworks (i.e., whose training varies, or

without a strict theoretical background), there may be more inconsistencies between educators' beliefs and their actual practices. For instance, in both Kontos and Dunn (1993) and File's (1994) research educators with varied amounts of child related education were included (i.e., educators had been exposed to different levels of training and early childhood training) as a result, findings suggested that there was not an absolute consistency between the educators beliefs and practices, it is possible that the different levels of training were a factor in these findings. Understanding the different levels of training and the experiences that the educators have prior to and following training could help researchers pin-point why there are discrepancies between these studies.

Another factor that may affect the level of consistency between educators' beliefs and practices may be related to the depth of the beliefs. When beliefs about teaching are coupled with other beliefs (i.e., child development, play) there should be greater consistency between beliefs and practice (Ernest, 1989). When educators are taught in a program where there is a strong theoretical background, one that enforces connections between pedagogy and personal beliefs, greater consistency between beliefs and practice should be apparent (Charlesworth et al., 1991). Therefore, it is plausible that educators who have been trained in an establishment with little if any theoretical background or framework, there may be a greater discrepancy between their beliefs and actual practice. Understanding what educators' beliefs were prior to practice and how they may have changed or magnified over the course of their training are important elements to study and may prove to explain why there are inconsistencies between beliefs and practice.

The research on educator attitudes suggests contradictory results indicating that: (1) educators value play but do not seem to consistently implement it in the classroom. Some educators' attitudes suggest that they value play but believe that it is not what parents and society want, while others suggest that they do not have sufficient time, materials and

support. Hence, their beliefs do not get translated consistently into practice, (Wood & Bennett, 1998; Lehrer et al., 2007) and (2) some educators appear not to value or implement play in the curriculum (Pajares, 1992; Wood & Bennett, 1998).

While certain social attitudes and the beliefs of some parents reflect a devaluing of play, many educators continue to espouse a belief in the value of play. Research seems to indicate that some educators do value play and believe that it should be at the core of ECE curriculum (Ashton, 1983; Kontos, 1999; McMullen, 1999). These same educators are cognisant of the fact that play is a rich, varied, and complex process that requires significant time, materials, and resources to enhance children's development (Christie & Wardle, 1992; Cooper & Taylor Dever, 2001; Griffing, 1983; Kavanaugh, Eizenman, & Harris, 1997; Roskos & Christie, 2002; Saracho, 1994). Despite these frequently espoused attitudes, the same educators often do not practice play significantly in the classroom.

A cited reason for the disparity between educators' beliefs and their actual implementation of play is the gap between rhetoric and reality (Kagan & Smith, 1988; Michelet, 1986; Shipley, 2008). This gap is considered to be one of the main impediments to the implementation of play in ECE environments. Educators' espoused beliefs frequently do not mirror their actual practices in the classroom. The educators say they firmly believe in the value of play, however do not follow through when it comes to the actual classroom practice (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Vartuli, 1999). Hence, while many educators posit that children learn best through play, when observed in the classroom, their focus is seen to be much more adult-centered. This finding may suggest that perhaps the educators were not aptly prepared to transfer their experiences learned in training to the classroom. Or it is possible that they held a theoretical positioning which may have differed from their training programs? In order to understand why there are these marked differences it is important to study the issue at hand focusing on educators' beliefs prior to and following training.

A similar line of research indicates that educators' attitudes towards play indicate that play is important, however it has a secondary role in the actual classroom practice (McMullen, 1999; Pajares, 1992). Moyles (1995) posits that most educators contend that play is valuable and has a place in the classroom, yet their attitudes indicate that it is secondary to more academic-oriented activities, which they themselves direct and supervise. This finding suggests that educators' actual beliefs are not in line with their practice. It is possible that these discrepancies exist because the educators may work in an environment where their theoretical beliefs are at odds with their colleagues or the direction. If they work in a daycare where the parents and director expect more teacher-directed learning, it is quite possible that a more child-centered approach may be left to the wayside.

Sandberg and Samuelson (2003) cite parental, government, and societal attitudes as a potential threat to the amount of play that educators incorporate into their classrooms. These researchers believe that these varied opinions weigh heavily on the educators' attitudes and influence how much play is actually implemented into the classroom. Stipek and Byler (1997) also point out that many educators feel they are not able to implement a program that is consistent with their beliefs, suggesting that they are sometimes encouraged to emphasize a more basic skills approach. McMullen (1999) concurs with the latter argument, stating that parents, administrators, and government often force educators to internalize certain constraints that may in turn go against their own personal beliefs. These types of constraints may help to explain why some researchers have found that educators' who believe in the relevance of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) play experiences do not always reinforce these beliefs in practice (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Kontos & Dunn, 1993). Educators are often faced between choosing what they think is best practice and ensuring that they provide a curriculum that meets the needs of the parents, government and society (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003). In sum, educators' beliefs support

play, but the practice seems to be neglected due to a combination of the disparity between rhetoric and reality and parental/governmental/societal pressures. In order to understand the development of educators' play beliefs and how they may translate into the classroom it is necessary to track these beliefs prior to and following their training experiences.

On the opposite end of the spectrum we find those educators whose attitudes indicate that they do not value nor do they implement play into their actual classroom practice (Pajares, 1992; Veenman, 1984). These educators seem to focus on the importance of meeting developmental milestones through more teacher-directed activities (McMullen, 1999; Shipley, 2008; Veenman, 1984). As a result, Norris (2000) suggests that the activities they direct prepare the children for didactics (early reading, writing, mathematics) instead of enabling the children to learn at their own pace. Perhaps these educators hold different theoretical positions as a result of their own experiences in their training programs. It would be important to understand what their beliefs are and how they have been reinforced. It is possible that their training programs advocated more teacher-directed approaches or perhaps they did not follow a specific training program in ECE? In tracking the development of educators' beliefs about play we may discover why there is an inconsistency between beliefs and practice.

Structural barriers. *Structural* challenges are the second most cited barrier in early childhood classrooms. Structural barriers are composed of the following elements: the curriculum, policies, regulations, and mandates in place within each province/territory (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003; Wood & Bennett, 1998). Academic structures are designed and implemented by ministries and administrators attempting to meet particular mandates. The literature in North American classrooms suggests that many of the current mandates focus on standardized testing and pressures to succeed (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). However, in Québec (Ministère de Familles et Aînés, 1997; 2007), the mandates are developed so that

the whole child benefits from the curriculum and daily interactions. Therefore, structural barriers should not pose a challenge for the educators in these classrooms.

As seen earlier, the latest research on brain development has incited a trend to push further concepts on children earlier in hopes of providing them with better opportunities for future development (Morrison, 2004; Shore, 1997; Wood & Bennett, 1998). With this trend, some policy makers and administrators are advocating for a “work first” followed by a “play afterwards” curriculum (Lehrer et al., 2007). In some ECE programs there has been a shift towards the learning of cognitive skills in the classroom (Fromberg, 1990; Kemple, 1996; Smilansky, 1990; Smith, 1988). The focus is placed on the learning of didactic (e.g., reading, writing, math) skills in preparation for the primary years. This academic curricula (nonplay based) is composed of several benchmarks that the educators must ensure that the children achieve by the end of each year. With certain guidelines already in place educators often find themselves struggling to implement play into an already predefined curriculum.

The curriculum of an ECE classroom is administered and developed by the provincial/territorial ministries in Canada. The curriculum divides portions of the day and provides educators with feedback on how to administer periods of instruction. The structures of the ECE programs that educators are required to implement have a major role in the classroom dynamics. In Québec, the curriculum is outlined by the Ministry of Education (Ministère de Familles et Aînés, 1997; 2007) with core periods of the day focused on outdoor physical activity and learning through play. The educators are expected to plan objectives for the development of the whole child on a weekly basis (and these should be posted outside of their classrooms). The directors of the daycare are in charge of overseeing the curriculum.

Hatch and Freeman (1988) conducted ethnographic interviews with 36 kindergarten informants (educators, principals, and kindergarten supervisors) regarding their play philosophies and practices. Two broad generalisations were identified by the participants:

first, the participants felt that the kindergarten program was becoming increasingly academic and skills oriented; and two, the educators believed that their classroom curriculum did not meet the needs of the children. Despite some educator attitudes and beliefs in favour of play, structures (i.e., curricula) constrained the implementation of play. Perhaps the findings could have been more specific if the researchers used more concrete methods, such as observations in the classrooms and focused on the educators' perspectives and beliefs more specifically and then extended the research to their actual practice in the classroom.

In conclusion, as a result of the desire for children to be prepared for Kindergarten and primary levels, some ECE educators feel pressured to teach formally, rather than informally through play (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Klugman & Smilansky, 1990; Miller, 1999; Wood & Attfield, 1996). Hence, the structure of the program may be less play oriented as a result of above cited pressures. Nevertheless, future studies need to reflect the educators' beliefs about play and how these beliefs have been developed over time. It is difficult to ascertain if these attitudes and structural barriers have in fact impacted the educators' beliefs and resulted in less time for play in the classroom. It is possible that the use of varied research approaches such as more in-depth interviews, classroom observations over pro-longed periods of time, and even focus groups may lead to a greater understanding between educator play beliefs and practice.

Functional barriers. Finally, functional barriers are another cited hindrance to the amount of play incorporated into ECE classrooms. Functional barriers are those elements linked to structure that limit the educators' opportunities to develop their current skills such as: lack of time and funding for appropriate in-service training (professional development), lack of benefits, low wages, and lack of community support (Beach, Bertrand, Forger, Michal, & Tougas, 2004; Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000; McMullen, 1999; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003).

Functional barriers are closely linked with structural barriers. Structure gives rise to functional barriers because, among other things, it diminishes time allotments for play (less time for play in the curriculum) and diminishes budgets allotted for play materials, play curricula, educator in-service training, educator support, and educator salaries. When time and budget are factors faced by the educators, less time is provided for play in the curriculum, less money is provided by the government to support professional development and functional barriers begin to escalate (Kagan & Smith, 1988; Lehrer et al., 2007; McMullen, 1999; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003).

Some educators are not provided with enough time or funding for professional development (Beach et al., 2004; Doherty et al., 2000; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003) leading to a functional barrier in the classroom. According to Wood and Bennett (1988) educators need to spend time dialoguing with colleagues about current curricula and the play needs of the children in their setting. Without the time to allow for constant face-to-face communication, educators often feel isolated and alone (Beach et al., 2004). Educators need a combination of direct and indirect support once in the field such as dialoguing between peers, attending workshops and conferences to develop their current skills, as well as receiving mentorship to help the educators achieve a balance between new careers and best practices (Beach et al., 2004).

Additional cited functional barriers include low salaries, few fringe benefits, and lack of support from the community (Doherty et al., 2000). These functional barriers are tied to high turn-over rates and less adequate in-service training (Wood & Bennett, 1996). Educators who are not given the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships between colleagues and members of the community often become isolated and feel undervalued. When educators feel isolated and undervalued they often leave their jobs in search of something better, which results in a high turn-over rate and inconsistency for the children in the early childhood

centre as they are constantly being moved from one room to another with a different educator (Beach et al., 2004; Doherty et al., 2000; Wood & Bennett, 1996).

In sum, the functional challenges, such as lack of in-service training and community support faced by the educators has been cited as a contributor to the decrease in play-based learning environments. As a result, these three barriers can contribute to a decrease in the implementation of play in ECE classrooms.

Training-into-practice or praxis. A possible fourth element not listed by Kagan (1990) as to why educators may not be implementing play is that they are having difficulty translating their training-into-practice or praxis (Bowman, 1990; BurrIDGE, Carpenter, Cherednichenko, & Kruger, 2010; Michelet, 1986). Michelet (1986) suggests that educators do not seem to be aptly prepared to implement play consistently, either in course or practical work.

Michelet (1986) posits that educators seem to have difficulty transferring the knowledge learned in their training to the actual classroom practice (theory into practice or praxis). We will look at this concept in the following section. Perhaps this difficulty in transferring play knowledge into practice may explain the disparity between what the educators actually say and do in their classrooms.

In order to understand how educators' develop play beliefs and how they can translate these beliefs into the classroom, it is important to look at what praxis involves. By reviewing the literature on praxis we will be able to understand the process involved and understand why some educators may have difficulty bridging the gap between theory and practice (Michelet, 1986).

Theory into Practice or Praxis

Theory into practice or praxis involves the translation of learning or theory into practice and requires the educator to think about what she/he is doing and how to apply

learned skills and knowledge to their classroom activities (Schön, 1990). Perkins and Salomon (1988) describe praxis as the use of skills acquired by an individual in transferring knowledge from one context to a new situation (i.e., transfer of knowledge from training program into actual classroom practice with the children).

In the ECE field, this process is often called reflective practice and has a long standing tradition (Dewey, 1933). Reflective practice is increasingly used as a means to support educator professional development, and ultimately to support educators' efforts to improve their own reflection on the transfer of theory into practice or what is also termed "praxis" (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, Lopez-Torres, 2003). Praxis is a practice embedded in a larger process, namely educator learning (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003). Praxis involves the educator reflecting on his/her learning through the use of discursive inquiry into practice. Praxis encourages educators to reflect on theories, skills, ideas, and then to apply them to a real life context such as the classroom (Burridge et al., 2010).

The terms "reflection" and "reflective practice" stem from Dewey's (1933) original work and have since become a hallmark in teacher education programs helping prospective educators in making meaningful educational decisions. According to Dewey (1933), reflective practice (i.e., the act of reflecting on and then practicing ideas) can be defined as a form of problem solving requiring "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it ends" and putting this reflection into practice (p. 118). In the ECE field, the art of translating play beliefs into the classroom requires a great deal of reflective practice. Educators must be able to reflect on theory/knowledge introduced in course work and then translate this information into the classroom as they plan and organize activities for young children.

Dewey's (1933) original ideas on reflective practice were later interpreted by Schön (1983, 1990), whose ideas on praxis have also been used extensively. Schön (1983, 1990) posited that the most important aspect in praxis is the ability to "frame" and "reframe" a problem, enabling it to be seen from multiple perspectives. Schön differentiated two dimensions of praxis as "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action." Reflection-on-action involves looking back on the actual planning process and reflecting on what was done. As educators 'reflect-on-action', such as on the theories they have internalized through their training, they must be able to reflect and then translate this to the classroom (e.g., as an educator may stimulate a conversation as the children explore at the water table, she remembers learning about open-ended questioning and prompting in her training). As one reflects on his/her actions, they develop a deeper understanding of why they do particular things (i.e., why they make certain decisions).

"Reflection-in-action" is the simultaneous thinking and reflecting about teaching practice as it occurs (Schön, 1990). For instance, some things we carry out spontaneously and we do not have to think about in performance (i.e., routines of the day in a daycare classroom) and we are often unaware of having learned them. Reflection-in-action can take place between morning routines or during the week as the educators sit down to reflect on the children's learning, experiences, and responses to the environment and classroom activities.

Schön (1983), in particular, is interested in understanding what he calls the "swampy low lands" of practice and is curious about how professionals make reflective decisions that impact how they do their jobs, how they apply theory, and the degree to which they apply theory. In speaking of "lowlands", he discusses how the part of coming to terms with the process of how theory gets translated into practice is related to "experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through" (p. 43).

Schön's (1990) work looks particularly into what promotes the decisions professionals make regarding the transfer of theory into practice (i.e., what specific information do they retain and how do they apply this in actual practice) and he attempts to capture a picture of how those decisions become translated into practice. Part of the process in understanding how educators translate their play beliefs into the classroom relates to their "praxis." Hence, it is crucial to understand how educators' reflect on what they have learned about play and how they transfer this into their own classroom.

On many occasions educators may be noted to make specific decisions based on the four categories outlined by Schön (1983): experience, trial-and-error, intuition, and muddling through. Experience affects educators' choices and judgment in the moment. Through past experience educators are able to reflect on past skills and theories and apply them to a new context. Trial-and-error involves educators applying theories and skills based on experience as well as successes and failures. This involves the educator in a reflective process, where she/he may explore novel ideas and approaches that can be adapted to a new context. Intuition plays a vital role in praxis as educators will change ideas and planning based on the moods and temperaments of children, as well as the educator's own feelings. For instance, an educator may plan to read a story at circle time but intuitively realizes that the children are too active to sit through a story. Instead, she integrates a movement activity where the children can exert their energy rather than sitting down. Muddling through involves the educators in a sink-or-swim situation where they perform acts or skills with the objective of staying afloat. Educators are faced with many barriers to the implementation of play as mentioned in the previous sections (e.g., attitudinal, functional, structural), but by understanding the process and determinants involved in this lengthy process of praxis, educators and policy makers may become more informed in understanding how these lines are crossed.

One of the barriers in the implementation of play into the ECE classroom is the educator's inability to translate theory into practice effectively (Michelet, 1986).

Encouraging pre-service and in-service educators to reflect on beliefs, ideas, skills, and experiences before, during, and after teaching, has been supported by research (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983) and has assisted educators in translating learning into practice. A major aspect of the present study requires educators to reflect on their own beliefs regarding play and to consider how these beliefs are translated into actual classroom practice.

Some studies on the translation of theory into practice support the notion that training programs need to be re-organized in order to emphasize the importance of practice over theory (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Kolb, 1984; McMullen, 1999). This research suggests that educators need more practical experiences so as to understand how to apply beliefs, ideas, skills, and theories into the classroom activities and environment. For example, Kessels and Korthagen (1996) and Kolb (1984) argue that practice should take precedence over the actual theory learned in teacher training programs. Kolb (1984) posits that by engaging in reflective practice during field experiences and practical work, educators can make changes in their well-established beliefs about teaching and learning.

Similarly, Kessels and Korthagen (1996) emphasize practice over theory, as they argue that students need perceptual knowledge more than conceptual knowledge when bridging the gap between practice and theory. Hence, suggesting that the focus in training should be more on the students' practical work rather than on learning the theories abstractly. In their work, these authors believe that student educators need what they call "practical wisdom (phronesis), not scientific understanding" (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 19). Phronesis involves the actual application of theory based on intuition, experience, and trial-and-error. Emphasizing the practice or immediate application of key ideas may in turn prove

to be a valid resource for educators as they use their *phronesis* (practical wisdom) to learn about best practices and emergent curricula. *Phronesis* seems to be in line with the process of *praxis* in which the educator uses a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge in applying what he/she has learned to a new context.

Kennedy (1999) and her colleagues in the “Teacher Education and Learning to Teach” study followed over 100 educators in nine differently structured programs and observed that they uniformly faced a “problem of enactment.” Kennedy (1999) advocates that educators need to work on developing “situated knowledge, meaning knowledge that is understood through specific situations rather than, or in addition to, knowledge that is understood abstractly” (p. 71). Further, in a report on the problem of teaching by the National Academy of Education, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith and McDonald (2005) iterate similar concerns about courses producing “inert knowledge” rather than knowledge that can be applied in action. This interactive view does not neglect the importance of theory: “‘application’ and ‘innovation’ are tightly intertwined and need to be learned together, in the context of a schema that provides means for reflection and further learning” (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 374). However, this view does bring to light the significance of application and practice in the learning process. Perhaps research studies need to focus on a combination of both pre-service and in-service experiences in order to develop a more in-depth look at how educators actually develop certain beliefs and understandings in training and then how they apply this to their own classrooms. It would be helpful to understand educators’ personal beliefs about play and education prior to their training and track how these beliefs have changed or developed over time.

The educator must find ways to link theory with practice independently through reflective practice. In other words, the educator takes on the role of an independent artisan who must create her own techniques (Huberman, 1993). The techniques that are created are

done so in practice, as the educator gains experience and learns through trial-and-error.

Comenius (cited in Norris, 2000) sums up the importance of practice in the refinement of skills in this quote “Artisans do not detain their apprentices with theories, but set them to do practical work at an early stage; thus they learn to forge by forging, to carve by carving, to paint by painting, and to dance by dancing” (p. 173). Hence, ECE educators do not develop their play beliefs in a vacuum, but do so through a variety of experiences such as training, practical work experiences, as well as their own experiences with play.

The concept of praxis has been widely debated by researchers who posit that knowledge may be difficult to transfer from one context to another, because it is embedded in the original context (DeCorte, 1999; Perkins & Salomon, 1989). If and when transfer does occur, it is related to the mindful transfer of general principles to the new situation or repeated exposure to the general principle or the practice that later becomes adopted automatically (Perkins & Salomon, 1989). Perkins and Salomon (1989) suggest that in order to engage in the transfer of knowledge from one context to another, the educator must be able to draw upon relevant prior knowledge in order to construct new learning experiences in different contexts in the classroom. Educators especially need to be prepared for this transfer, since this is the basis of their classroom curriculum. In order to engage in praxis the educator must be able to see similarities between prior learning (beliefs, theory and practice) and the current situation and then find opportunities in which he/she can transfer this knowledge to the current context (DeCorte, 1999). By asking educators to reflect on their own prior learning and to share this information with others, this may in turn help them become more reflective practitioners.

Salomon and Perkins (1989) found two ways in which knowledge that is acquired in one context can be transformed in another: low road and high road transfer. “Low road” occurs when an act is done habitually, or without consciousness. For instance, when a

teacher automatically draws on some previous experience and responds in accordance with this information, similar to what Schön (1990) calls reflection-in-action. The “high road” involves a conscious retrieval of information from previous situations. The educator may consciously think back to a previous situation and retrieve this knowledge to apply directly to the situation. In both cases, the low road and high road to transfer may help educators acquire “principles of practice” helping them learn how to behave (Elbaz, 1983).

According to Polkinghorne (1992), context plays an important role in the process of praxis. Practitioners take the lead from the specifics of the context (i.e., classroom set up, responses of the children) while drawing on their *phronesis* (practical wisdom); that is, the educator is not simply regurgitating theory, but actually needs to hold a certain level of practical knowledge as well. In ECE, play beliefs are constructed based on a combination of factors such as context, theories, and skills. Decisions made by educators in the moment will depend on many factors (i.e., context, physical environment, group of children, direction from the director, curricula, materials available to them, their own play beliefs, support from colleagues, and parents), but especially context (Polkinghorne, 1992). Depending on the classroom, a number of factors such as the teacher, the method of teaching used, and the type of communication that the educators engage in while learning about play, may lead to the transfer of knowledge into classroom practice (Polkinghorne, 1992).

Understanding the notions behind theory into practice is especially important in the present research, as the participants and myself will be moving from reported beliefs to practice. Part of this process also entails honing in on the distinction between what the educators say and what they actually do in the classroom. Hence, the context in which the learning occurs and how it is later transferred is extremely important.

According to Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2011) making the transition from the classroom (theory-based) into the workforce (practice-based) is always a challenge in any domain, but

especially for educators within a tacit teaching culture advocating a “sink or swim” attitude. Many educators are faced with insurmountable challenges that lead to early attrition and burn-out (Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). Among other issues faced are the reported difficulties that educators have in applying learnt skills into practice. A deeper understanding of how educators transfer knowledge from training into the actual classroom practice is merited.

Early experiences as an educator are crucial and lay the foundations for the coming years, as well as affecting the attitudes of educators towards the profession (Ballantyne, 2007). The discrepancies between educators' expectations of school life and the realities of teaching often contribute to “praxisshock”, elsewhere spelled “praxis shock” (Ballantyne, 2007). Praxis shock is when the novice teacher's classroom expectations are shattered by the reality of classroom practice. As a result, the school environment often becomes more powerful in determining teacher-practice than the actual pre-service training (Lampert & Ball, 1999), which may serve as a barrier to the implementation of play. When educators are not certain of their own theoretical positioning on play and have not had time to actually reflect on how they may transfer these beliefs into practice they may choose to simply follow their colleagues disregarding what they learnt in training.

If training has not effectively prepared educators for praxis, they may end up rejecting the knowledge and skills that they learned in university/college and unconsciously adopt the teaching culture at their place of employment (Ballantyne, 2007). Similarly, Ball, Sleep, Boerst, and Bass (2009) posit that teacher education must help beginners learn how to teach, not just learn to hear and talk about it. Another major issue that may be in part related to the discrepancy between translating theory into practice may be the divide in training. The traditional model of teacher training has a clear divide between teaching theory and practice when the university or college provides “the theory, skills, and knowledge about teaching through coursework: the school provides the field setting where such knowledge is applied

and practiced: and the beginning teacher provides the individual effort that integrates it all” (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998, p. 160). The process involved in the transfer of theory into practice is significant. By tracking the process involved in praxis, the educators become involved in reflection-on-action as participants in the current study, and as they are asked to reflect on what they do and how they do things in the classroom they reflect-in-action, highlighting a crucial aspect of the transfer of knowledge into practice.

In the following section I will give a brief overview: of the relevance of educators’ beliefs, the role of pre-service and post-service experience in the development of beliefs, core and peripheral beliefs, and the diversity among educators’ beliefs.

Relevance of Educators’ Beliefs

Early childhood educators’ thinking may be guided in part by a personally held system of beliefs (culturally derived) and values (see Anning, 1991; Conners, 1978), and by a broad knowledge of content and teaching strategies that inform their teaching practice and go largely unarticulated (Cruickshank, 1990; Elbaz, 1983). An educator’s interactions with his or her students plays a major role in the learning process. This interaction is believed to be constructed by the educator’s own history, culture, upbringing, experiences, knowledge, and beliefs that are carried into the classroom. The values and beliefs the educator carries into the classroom are not only gained through training in the field, but also through childhood experiences, as well as their cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds (Shulman, 1986). An educator’s beliefs inevitably impacts her own teaching style, classroom practice, choice of materials in the classroom, as well as activities (Cruickshank, 1990; Elbaz, 1983). The most effective teaching is believed to occur when there is a consistency between an educators’ beliefs and practices (Bussis, Chittendan, & Amarel, 1976; Marcon, 1999). When educators believe in and can effectively articulate their philosophy and beliefs, the results can be very positive (Charelsworth et al., 1993).

Role of Beliefs

Belief systems guide educators' expectations about child development, child behaviour, and classroom management (Marcon, 1999). Educators' belief systems are often already in place, based on their own lived experiences, before they even begin their formal training. It is also recognized that one's beliefs and values are difficult to change or alter (Pajares, 1992). Research indicates that many educators arrive with predefined beliefs about education prior to their training, and these beliefs are often difficult to change or alter (Pajares, 1992; Shulman, 1986). As a way to bridge the apparent gap between educators' beliefs and their actual classroom practice, lengthy training has been cited as one way to help educators develop more appropriate ECE beliefs, philosophies, thinking, and approaches (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). In fact, Brown, Dillabough and Halsey (2006) and McCarthy, Canziani, Leary, Dokken and White (2001) suggest that educators with higher education (college degree in ECE or Bachelors) were found to have stronger developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice and as a result, higher quality classrooms. A strong knowledge base of child development and play theories may in fact impact educators' beliefs and philosophies of education, which in turn may help them better understand children's individual needs and behaviors (McCarthy et al., 2001; Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

Despite training in ECE, the ability to clearly articulate one's own beliefs and philosophies is a challenge (Pajares, 1992). Considering this challenge, it is important to elucidate how educators' come to conceptualise their play beliefs and later translate these into their actual classroom practice. Much of what a educator knows or believes about early childhood even after their training is tacit: therefore, educators are often unaware of their own beliefs, and have difficulty describing and even labelling their beliefs (Cooney, 1985; Thompson, 1984). When educators are aware of their own beliefs and the knowledge they

have developed throughout their lived experiences (including training) they are in a better position to make choices in the classroom and define why they made those choices (Vartuli, 1999).

The main focus in this research, is understanding how educators have come to develop play beliefs and how they may transfer these beliefs into practice. When educators are able to clearly articulate their play beliefs, this in turn may assist them in bridging the apparent gap between theory and practice (Michelet, 1986). Understanding the diversity among educators' beliefs is helpful in this study as it may shed light on why some educators choose to practice play in their classrooms while others employ a more teacher-directed approach.

Research Looking at Teacher Beliefs

The following section will briefly review early childhood research on teacher beliefs and practices, presenting the context for the current study. Research on early childhood educators' beliefs and practices has focused on: (1) the relationship between educators' reported beliefs and practices with regard to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (across grade levels and program types); (2) educators' beliefs and practices concerning literacy and curriculum issues (i.e., programs, materials, policies), and (3) educators' beliefs and reported practices with regards to play. Research to date has not focused on early childhood educators' beliefs about play in Québec and how these beliefs become translated in practice.

Beliefs and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). In the following section I will outline some of the pertinent studies that have been conducted to date concerning ECE educators' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice in order to illuminate the studies done to date.

A body of work that has received great attention is the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators related to DAP. The latter term typically refers to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) definition of a curriculum which focuses on the individual child's particular needs and developmental stage, with emphasis on child-directed learning based on play, rather than skill oriented learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Typically, researchers investigated whether the educators who espouse DAP beliefs, in effect implement these beliefs in practice (Charlesworth, et al., 1991; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Below we will discuss the research completed in detail.

In many studies educators' DAP beliefs and practices have been found to be fairly congruent with their practice (Charlesworth, et al., 1991; Kagan & Smith, 1998; McMullen, 1999). Charlesworth et al., (1991) sought to examine the relationship between 113 kindergarten educators' beliefs and their practices. Data collection involved a Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) and the Instructional Activities Scale (IAS). The results depicted positive correlations between developmentally appropriate beliefs and activities and developmentally inappropriate beliefs and activities. Furthermore, results showed that educators who regarded themselves as in control of planning and implementation of instruction had more DAP scores on both the TBS and the IAS scales. Results suggested that that educators who espoused DAP beliefs also reported planning developmentally appropriate activities.

In a similar study, Charlesworth et al., (1993) measured the developmental appropriateness of kindergarten educators' beliefs and practices using the guidelines outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Questionnaires were given to 204 kindergarten educators asking for their input on curriculum goals, teaching strategies, guidance of socio-emotional, cognitive, language, physical, aesthetic development, motivation, and assessment. Observations were conducted in 20 classrooms for

approximately 3 hours each. During this observation period an observation checklist (The Checklist for Rating Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Kindergarten Classrooms) was administered. Results suggested that there was a moderate statistically significant correlation between educators' reported beliefs and their practice of developmentally appropriate teaching. The educators were reported using instruction practices that were at least moderately related to their own reported beliefs. However, there was a slight discrepancy between the educators professed importance of DAP, and what actually went on in the classrooms. The results in this study prove to be misleading and do not support the congruence between the educators' beliefs and practice and require further research. The inconsistent findings may be due to a number of methodological factors: the broad nature of the research questionnaires (focus too broad), the high number of participants and the methods employed did not allow for an in-depth review of both beliefs and practices, the short duration and sporadic observations may not have enabled the researchers to get a full picture of the educators' reported beliefs and how they are translated into their own classrooms, suggesting the need for a more systematic approach.

A related study conducted by McMullen (1999) investigated 20 early childhood educators (working with children between ages of 3 and 9 years) DAP beliefs and practices. Initially questionnaires were administered to all participants inquiring into their own beliefs and practices. The questionnaires measured the strength of DAP beliefs and practices. Following completion of the questionnaire the principal researcher visited each classroom to observe the use of DAP (two visits approximately 1-1.5 hours each time) practice. Findings suggested that despite differences between preschool and primary educators, overall the educators DAP beliefs were strongly correlated with practices ($r = .79$). Further, preschool educators scored higher on DAP beliefs as well as actual classroom practice. Educators who had a specialized training in early childhood education rather than just elementary education

appeared to be more DAP in their classroom practices. Additional research may need to inquire into the effectiveness of teacher training and offer more in-service professional development. The focus of this study was primarily quantitative, therefore limiting the scope of the findings to statistical results. Further research is needed to understand how these beliefs actually are translated into practice. In addition, the educators' training program was not discussed in light of their development of play beliefs and would prove to be an important part of the questioning. In terms of the methods used individual or focus group interviews would enable the educators to share specific information related to their development of DAP beliefs and explain how they practice their beliefs in the classroom. A questionnaire can be helpful, but does not allow the educator to share information in an open-ended manner. Furthermore, the use of classroom observation is important in understanding how beliefs get translated into practice, however the time in the field should be longer than 1.5 hours. This study would greatly benefit from prolonged time in the classrooms getting to know the daily routines and approaches adopted by the teachers.

Vartuli (1999) explored DAP beliefs of 137 early childhood educators (Head Start through third grade) and how those beliefs related to classroom practice. In order to investigate the educators' self-reported practices three measures were adopted: Early Childhood Survey of Beliefs and Practices (Marcon, 1988) used to gather global beliefs and practices across grade levels, Teacher Beliefs Scale (Charlesworth, et al., 1991) administered to detect more specific beliefs and practices and have educators judge importance of each item, the Classroom Practices Inventory (Vartuli, 1992) used to observe actual events in the classroom and compare the results with perceived beliefs and practices. The data were gathered over a 5 year period, with an observation session in each classroom in the Fall and the Spring of each calendar year. Belief measures were moderately correlated and the observed practices supported educators' self-reported beliefs and practices. Findings

suggested that the educators' beliefs were significantly more appropriate than their practice in each grade level, suggesting that the educators did not always follow through on their beliefs in the classroom. As the grade level increased the level of self-reported DAP beliefs and practice decreased. Educators in grades 1 through 3 did not rate DAP as important as the Head Start (preschool) and kindergarten educators. Interestingly, those educators with fewer years of experience and training specifically in early childhood, as opposed to just elementary teaching were reported to believe in DAP more than their counterparts. This research suggested that when there is conflict between what educators believe and what they practice, then end result may lead towards incongruent teaching beliefs and practice (Bussis et al., 1976). More research is needed that can help educators examine their own play beliefs and reflect on how those beliefs are translated into practice. The methods used in the current study are limited (questionnaires, surveys, classroom practice inventory) as they only allow for certain pre-determined questions to be answered and do not enable the educators to add discuss questions or beliefs outside of the questionnaire. More naturalistic approaches would be important in determining what the educators' beliefs were and how they were reflected in practice.

Second language learning and literacy in the curriculum. A second area of research related to early childhood educators' beliefs and practices relates to second language learning and literacy in the classroom, as well as curriculum (see Clarke & Peterson, 1986; Elbaz, 1981; Moon & Reifel, 2008; Shulman, 1986).

Kagan and Smith (1988) examined the relationship between the cognitive styles of kindergarten educators. The focus was on the educator's tendency to endorse either a child-centered versus a teacher-structured learning approach. Fifty-one educators completed self-report instruments that assessed their cognitive style (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), teaching ideology (Inquiry Mode Questionnaire and Teacher Belief Rating Scale), classroom

behaviour (evaluated through a Teacher Structure Checklist), and occupational stress. The results suggested that educators' beliefs and classroom behaviour were consistent with practice, namely kindergarten educators were able to operationalize their beliefs, and their perceptions of the classroom environment were accurate. This finding seems to support the research conducted by Vartuli (1999) suggesting that educators in preschool and kindergarten tend to have more congruency between their reported beliefs and practice. A child-centered approach to teaching kindergarten was operationalized by the educators and a common set of observable behaviours were linked to the approach. Hence, an effective early childhood educator was defined as someone who encourages autonomy, provides a number of different activities for the children, and someone who does not overtly direct children, but manages to create positive verbal interactions amongst the group. This study adds to the literature, however the use of more in-depth methods could prove to be fruitful in understanding how educators have constructed certain beliefs. Using a combination of open-ended interviews, classroom observations and reflective focus-groups may have enabled the educators to share in the learning process.

In another study, Hatch and Freeman (1988) used an ethnographic interview methodology to examine kindergarten philosophies and practices from the perspectives of educators, principals and supervisors. A total of 36 informants participated in individual interviews focussing on: assumptions about how young children learn and develop, teaching experience (how lessons are taught and delivered), goals and objectives of their program, and assumptions about literacy. Two broad generalizations were identified based on the analysis of the results: kindergarten programs appear to be increasingly academic and skills oriented (with a preparation for 1st grade), and individuals responsible for implementing these programs may not believe their program meets the needs of the children, suggesting that there is a direct conflict between their own beliefs and the classroom contexts. Further

research may be needed to better understand why these educators' beliefs were in conflict with their actual practices. Perhaps giving the educators the possibility of sharing how they developed their beliefs and how they implement them into the classroom would be useful. It is necessary to understand why there are discrepancies between beliefs. It is possible that the participants shared beliefs that differed from the direction and therefore felt that they could not apply their own beliefs in the classroom. The results of this study support research suggesting that there are challenges to implementing beliefs into practice (Kagan, 1990; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999) and support the need for further research.

File (1994) sought to examine children's play (28 children between 4 and 5 years, 14 of which were diagnosed as having mild or moderate cognitive and/or speech and language delays), teacher-child interactions (36 educators across all classrooms), as well as teacher beliefs in an integrated early childhood program. The children were observed during free play using a time sampling measure and later coded for the types and level of cognitive and social play (solitary, parallel, interactive). Teacher-child interactions were collected during the observation periods in the classroom and the educators' behaviour with the target child was recorded (no involvement, involved routines, watching, supports cognitive play, supports social play). Finally teacher beliefs were measured using the Peer Relation Rating Scale and the Assessment of Teacher Role Scale (used a way to tap into the educators' perceptions of their role as mediator). The results suggested that educators were much more teacher directed in facilitating cognitive play of children with disabilities than with typically developing children. Interestingly, the teacher-child interactions focussing on the children's social play levels were relatively low for both groups of children. The support provided by the educators during play suggested that the cognitive aspects of play were more important than the social ones, despite the fact that educators' beliefs suggested that that children with disabilities needed more support in gaining social skills. It is possible that the participants

had different theoretical beliefs on the value of play and as a result responded differently in the classroom. Further, perhaps the educators had different training experiences which may have in turn influenced their own beliefs. Again, there appears to be a mismatch between educators' reported beliefs and their actual classroom practice, suggesting that further research needs to investigate educators' play beliefs and practice.

In order to better understand the potential link between educators' beliefs and behaviours, Wilcox-Herzog (2002) employed a mixed method study with 47 early childhood educators (working with children between the ages of 3-5). Teacher beliefs were collected through a self-report questionnaire and classroom practices were videotaped and analysed using four practice measures (teacher sensitivity, verbal responsiveness, teacher involvement, and teacher play style). The educators reported being able to practice their beliefs at least most of the time. Several reasons were listed as to why they were unable to implement their beliefs consistently: parents, directors, state regulations, other children, and themselves. Findings also suggested that when educators were certified in ECE they were more likely to be active participants in interactions with the children and use higher levels of communication skills with the children. Findings also showed that there was not a relationship between educators' beliefs and their actions which is in line with similar research finding inconsistencies between beliefs and actions (Charlesworth et al., 1993; File, 1994; Hatch & Freeman, 1988). It is possible that the methods used in this study did not allow the educators to accurately share their own beliefs nor reflect on how these beliefs were manifest in the classroom. Perhaps using more naturalistic methods would enable the educators to share their personal experiences and allow for more in-depth discussion and reflection amongst participants.

A similar study conducted by Stipek and Byler (1997) examined the relationships of 60 preschool, kindergarten, and grade one educators' beliefs about children's learning

patterns, views on the goals of early childhood education, and their positions on policies related to school readiness, retention, and their satisfaction with current practices and pressures for change. The authors measured educators' beliefs and practices using a questionnaire divided into three sections: program level (was it more academic/structured meeting their beliefs), educators' beliefs about parental satisfaction of the educational program, and finally, educators' views on school readiness and retention. In order to assess the teacher's practice, Stipek, Daniels, Galluzzo and Millburn (1992) early childhood program observation measure was used to rate 47 items related to classroom instruction and social climate (a total of 2.5 hours per class). Findings suggested that preschool and kindergarten educators' espoused beliefs about effective practices for young children were significantly associated with their goals and practices implemented within their classrooms. Further findings suggested that these educators' beliefs were also associated with a child-centered approach, one where there were positive social climates within the classroom and negative association with basic skills orientation (push towards academics). The educators' classroom practices were also associated with their goals, however they varied by grade level (greater focus on basic academic skills in grade 1). Approximately 68% of the educators cited that their program structure was not overly academically structured. The remaining educators claimed that the program was more academically oriented than they would like. In regards to parental pressures, the majority of the educators (N = 53) claimed that the parents were generally satisfied with the program. They listed changes that the parents would like to see such as: more homework, more emphasis on academics, more structure, and more challenging work for the bright children. It is difficult to ascertain if the educators were influenced by these external pressures, however it appeared that their beliefs were not always reflected in their practice.

Research Specific to Play Beliefs

In the following section I will introduce a smaller body of research which has focused specifically on educators' play beliefs and practice in both preschool and elementary schools.

Sandberg and Samuelson (2003) conducted phenomenological interviews with 20 Swedish preschool educators about their play beliefs (how they conceive, understand, and experience play). The interview questions focused on the educators' memories of play from their childhood, perceptions of children's play today compared with their own lived experiences, as well as their approach to play in the classroom. Overall, results depicted a stereotyped image of childhood play, whereas the men remembered playing rule governed games (i.e., hockey, soccer) and the females remembered engaging in more role play (i.e., playing dolls, storekeeper) (Sandberg & Samuelsson, 2003). A common thread among all educators was the belief that outdoor play was much more common when they were children than is the case in today's society. Both groups suggested that perhaps a reason for the decline in outdoor play could be due to lack of time for free play, too many interruptions with changes in schedules, activities, and the media's influence. These findings appear to support the work done by Wilcox-Herzog (2002) and Hatch and Freeman (1998), Veenman (1984) and McMullen (1999) suggesting that outside factors (i.e., external pressures, attitudes, etc.) may be one of the reasons why educators' beliefs are not reflected in practice. Perhaps a more in-depth look at how these educators developed their play beliefs and how they were translated into the classroom would shed more light on the topic. It is possible that differences in theoretical positioning, philosophical beliefs and personal experiences could also impact how certain beliefs get translated into practice.

In a similar line, Ryu and Tegano (2003) explored educators' beliefs and practices about play using a Beliefs and Practices about Play Questionnaire (Ryu, 2003) and also included a comparison across program types (between traditional and contemporary) and

levels (between preschools and kindergartens). The educators' self-reports on their beliefs and practices revealed that they did not generally consider play as a valuable teaching medium to promote children's thinking skills (cognitive), but they did believe play was a valuable way to promote social and physical skills. The researchers also found that preschool educators use play more often than kindergarten educators to promote social, cognitive, and physical domains. This research finding seems to be in line with other research which supports greater use of play in the early years as opposed to elementary school (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999). The self-reports also suggested that these same educators valued their engagement in pretend play less than in other more manipulative and constructive types of play. It is possible that different theoretical positioning could have impacted the self-reports. Understanding how these beliefs developed and if training had an impact on the beliefs would be important aspects to add to this study.

Wood and Bennett (1998) explored the theoretical orientations of preschool educators in play education: as either informed by constructivist or social constructivist theory. Data from an empirical study on educators' theories of play were reviewed in order to provide insights into how play was conceptualized and practiced in the classroom, and how the educators juxtaposed theory with practice. The authors suggest that research into play reflects two dominant theoretical orientations which play an important role in defining children's learning and development. Piaget's constructivist theories of learning (where the child constructs reality and knowledge from experience) and Vygotsky's social constructivist theories (placing greater emphasis on the social, cultural, and historical influences on a child's development) are examined in this study to elucidate the theories educators adhere to and act on in the classroom. Data were collected from nine educators (working with 4 to 5 year old children) throughout the school year using narrative accounts, interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires of educator beliefs, and team meetings. The results

indicated that the educators fell into one of two theoretical frameworks in regards to play beliefs and practice: Constructivist (Piaget) or Social Constructivist (Vygotsky). The educators participated in focus groups throughout the study. By the end of the study, many of the educators shifted their beliefs and/or their play practices and were able to identify a mismatch between their own beliefs and practice. Those that believed in the relevance of play but did not incorporate it into their classroom shifted their practices to match their beliefs. Those educators who did not believe in play shifted towards a new understanding and appreciation for play and began to incorporate play time into their classroom curricula. This research suggests that engaging educators in reflective types of exercises (focus groups, reflective discussion, etc.) may indeed prove to be beneficial in helping them communicate personal beliefs and theories about play. Further research is needed to understand if training, personal experiences prior to training may have influenced these current findings.

Most recently, Lehrer, Quance, Stathopoulos, and Petrakos (2007) employed a mixed method design to investigate the extent to which grade one educators in Québec believed play was important. They used a questionnaire assessing teacher beliefs, teacher practices, and perceptions of influence; classroom photos in seven grade one classrooms; and open-ended interviews with seven grade one educators across 26 French School Boards. The results showed that grade one educators believed in the importance of play, however the amount of play time in the classroom was limited. These educators also reported needing more support in their classrooms to develop play as a learning tool. Challenges cited to the implementation of play were linked with budgetary constraints, limited time, and the number of students in the classrooms. These findings are in line with related studies (McMullen, 1999; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003; Stipek & Byler; Vartuli, 1999; Veenman, 1984;) suggesting that the use of play in elementary school classrooms is less prevalent than in preschool settings, and challenges of implementing play listed as budgetary constraints,

classroom schedules, time, space and the number of children per classroom. Further study is merited to understand if these educators' beliefs were influenced by their training programs, school boards and colleagues.

In order to better understand the kinds of provisions ECE educators are making for children's play and ways in which these educators intervene in the play, Kemple (1996) interviewed 24 preschool and kindergarten educators. The participants were given an initial background questionnaire which described the educators years of experience, as well as training in early childhood education. Interview questions were adapted from Smilansky (1990) and focused on the educators' beliefs and practice regarding the promotion of sociodramatic play. Findings suggested that the educators espoused a strong belief in the relevance of sociodramatic play, and did not believe there was discrepancy between their beliefs and those of their administrators. A discrepancy was found however, between the educators' espoused beliefs and the amount of time they actually allotted in the classroom for sociodramatic play. Educators reported providing as little as 15 minutes and up to a maximum of 2 hours per day. When comparing the results of time allotted to play, the kindergarten educators provided significantly less time for play, and felt that they were not giving the children as much time to play as they would like to. The difference between the two levels apparently was not a result of administrative pressures, but more of an external pressure to prepare the children for standardized testing and school readiness in grade 1. A significant finding in this study, all but 4 of the educators indicated that they could not recall receiving any information or training on how to promote the children's sociodramatic play during their schooling. Perhaps this may suggest that without receiving the adequate experience and knowledge during training programs, many educators are unable to provide the necessary time and means to support this type of play. Bowman (1990) suggests that textbooks provide only superficial coverage of theories of play, making it very difficult for

educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Further study is needed to understand why certain educators fail to effectively translate their beliefs into practice.

Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers, and Roberts (2000) examined the attitudes and perceptions of play in the Reception Class (4-5 year olds) of five major stake-holders: head teacher, the reception class teacher, the classroom assistant, the parent and the child. Data collection involved a combination of measures, namely one-on-one semi-structured, informal, and individual interviews with all major stakeholders within 10 primary schools in England. Results depicted several important themes across the adult participants, namely that play can stimulate and extend learning, play can serve as a means to promote the child's whole development, on the other hand play often was regarded as a reward for the completion of work, and was seen as an organisational tool (something to keep the children busy while the teacher was occupied), curriculum pressure was believed to inhibit the amount of time made available for play and the level of adult involvement. Results from the children's interviews suggested that children viewed play as a reward once their work was completed, and were uncertain if play was as important as their 'work'. Overall, the results suggested that there was a gap between rhetoric and reality, as some adults stated the benefits of play as a learning tool, they did not always follow through in this vein. In order to assess the stakeholders beliefs about play it would be necessary to understand how they have developed their beliefs investigating the impact of their training, personal lived experiences, as well as practical experiences working with children. It is clear that there is a difference between the theoretical understanding of the participants, as some articulate different values in the utility of play.

Moon and Reifel (2008) conducted a study on a pre-kindergarten classroom's role of play in literacy learning. Naturalistic observations and documentation were collected on both the teacher and the children within the classroom over a two year period. Among the data

collected were interviews, informal conversations, scheduled observations, and self-reflexive notes about the teacher and her students. Findings revealed a number of themes regarding teacher beliefs about children and play in the literacy classroom. First, play served as an effective way to learn through hands-on and exploratory experiences. Second, the teacher assumed a variety of roles in the ESL classroom: provider, player, facilitator, and monitor of play. Third, the teacher expressed the use of play as game or a trick to help encourage the children to develop their language skills (i.e., use of pictures with words, use of acting out stories through play, dramatic play, block play, etc.). Fourth, the teacher cited constraints in incorporating her curriculum into the classroom as being: class size, different levels of students, shortage of school support (not providing enough props or school materials). Further research is needed to understand how educators' classroom practices are influenced by beliefs, and knowledge of early childhood development.

In sum, the literature on early childhood educators' beliefs about play is expanding. However, the studies conducted to date focus primarily on educators' beliefs through questionnaire responses, observation inventories, and interviews, and do not inquire into how play beliefs have been constructed or how they are performed in practice. An understanding of how educators' have come to develop their beliefs about play and then how they integrate these belief into practice is necessary. According to Wood and Bennett (1998), teacher theories include "the personal stock of information, skills, processes, experiences, beliefs and memories, and the assumption that sets of knowledge of different aspects of their work combine to create a theory or ideology" (p. 20). In essence an educators' beliefs about play will obviously be grounded in a wider set of theories regarding teaching and learning, which will in turn impact the choices that educators make (i.e., materials used, teaching instruction, and provisions made for play). When educators' speak about their play beliefs, they will draw on both theoretical and practical knowledge based not only on professional experience

(post-service experiences-teacher training), but also on personal experience (personal life philosophies, memories of play as a child, history, culture). Therefore, in the present study it is important to research and understand both educators' beliefs about play theories and practice, combining ideological and pedagogical orientations as well. Athey (1990) argues that early childhood educators are in powerful positions to help inform both theory and practice, as educators' perspectives make a valuable contribution to the wider debate about the relationship between theory and practice. As educators become more aware of their educational practices and what informs those practices they are in a position to inform the early childhood field, especially in regards to play, as well as support children's learning and development.

Considering that the research suggests that as children mature, their play becomes more purposeful, reflective, thoughtful, and "serious," as they continue to learn through their play (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Jones & Cooper, 2006; Wasserman, 1992), it does raise the question as to why there seems to be a mismatch between educators' play beliefs and actual practice? Some researchers suggest that a play-oriented curriculum correlates positively with literacy outcomes (Patton & Mercer, 1996); creativity (Bergen, 2002); ability to concentrate on academic tasks and student motivation (Holmes, Collins, & Calmels, 2006). In sum, the educational literature provides continued support for a play curriculum in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grade classrooms (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Jones & Cooper, 2006; Ministère de La Famille et Aînés, 1997, 2007; Patton & Mercer, 1996), and thus raises the question why, given strong support for the importance of play to children's development—both cognitive and social—does it appear educators' play beliefs are not consistently implemented in practice? Why are there inconsistencies between educators' reported beliefs and their classroom practice?

Educators' beliefs make up an important part of their general knowledge base

through which they make sense of and act upon information in the classroom (Clarke & Peterson, 1986). It is these core beliefs about play, child development, teaching approaches, and curriculum that influence educators' reactions to teacher education and practice (Ashton, 1983). How these implicit beliefs are incorporated into the daily decisions that educators make have been debated. Some researchers posit that educators do not rely solely on impulse when they make decisions in the classroom, but focus on predetermined outcomes (Putnam & Duffy, 1984). Others argue that educators' beliefs actually act as a filter through which a variety of judgments and decisions are made (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Understanding how educators' beliefs about play get translated into practice is important in this study.

When educators reflect on the beliefs systems they hold that lead them to make certain decisions, this enables the educators to be more reflective practitioners. When a teacher is asked to reflect on her beliefs about education, this can enable the teacher to make decisions about her curriculum. Thus, his/her beliefs about teaching can help lead the classroom organization and functioning (Spodek, 1988).

Pajares' contention, many years ago, that "research on the beliefs of pre-service educators is scarce" (Pajares, 1992, p. 328) and more research is needed on the nature and impact of beliefs on pre-service educators, is still relevant. Interest in educator beliefs about play, especially in Québec and the influence these beliefs have on classroom instruction is necessary. There is little research that specifically investigates ECE educators' beliefs about play and how such beliefs develop and translate into the classroom. This study, therefore, is timely as it investigates ECE educators' beliefs about play and how these beliefs are manifest in practice.

We will now look at the research questions that have guided this study.

Research Questions

Considering the initiative of the Québec government for instilling a play-based learning environment for all children in the CPE's, my focus was to explore the following questions: "What are ECE educators' beliefs about play? And how are these beliefs translated into practice?" More specifically:

- (a) What are their play beliefs
- (b) How do they practice play?
- (c) How do they incorporate both theoretical and practical components of play beliefs into the early childhood education classroom?

Chapter III: Epistemological Framework

Situated within a postmodern paradigm, this study focused on early childhood educators' constructed beliefs about play. Among the questions asked were: what are educators' personal beliefs and understandings about play; how do they practice play; how have they integrated theoretical and practical components into their own classrooms? These questions are best answered in the qualitative tradition, as they pay special attention to the process as opposed to the end product. Further, to understand how educators construct beliefs about play and how they perform it in practice, I employ a qualitative approach informed by an educators' beliefs framework using a constructivist philosophical backdrop. First, I will explain why I have chosen to focus primarily on educator beliefs about play. Second, I will define educator beliefs within the context of this study and explain how this will be used as my conceptual framework. Finally, in conjunction with a educators' beliefs framework, I will outline constructivism and explain its utility in this study.

Focus on Educators' Beliefs

Recently, there has been an increased interest in the association between educators' beliefs and classroom practice (Charlesworth, et al., 1993; Pajares, 1992; Tschannen-Moran Hoy & Hoy, 1998; Vartuli, 1999). This interest has moved towards understanding the thinking behind decisions educators make in the classroom and how these decisions are made (Fang, 1999; Pajares, 1992). Educators' personal beliefs play an important role in their actual teaching practices and have consistently shown to be good predictors of behaviours (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Pajares, 1992). Beliefs about teaching and learning are considered to be instrumental in guiding pedagogical decisions made in the classroom, as well as the selection of specific content and materials (Smith, 2005). Typically, educators draw on their beliefs on a daily basis in order to make decisions regarding pedagogy and classroom practice (Nespor, 1987). Despite the fact that teacher beliefs have been shown to be

predictive of their pedagogical practices, it has also been observed that educators often have difficulty translating their own beliefs into their actual classroom practice (Boud et al., 1985; DeCorte, 1999; Dewey, 1933; Pajares, 1992; Perkins & Salomon, 1989; Schön, 1983), hence adding an additional challenge to their daily activities within the classroom. An emphasis on teacher beliefs may shed further light on the teaching process and how educators make decisions based on their play beliefs and how they later incorporate these beliefs into practice (Fang, 1996). As the literature on Québec ECE educators' play beliefs is virtually nonexistent, it seemed evident that there would be much to gain by focusing the research lens on this topic.

As I am curious about the relationship between what educators believe and say about play and their actual classroom practice, it is important to focus on educators' beliefs as a conceptual framework which may help to better understand how educator's beliefs are constructed and later translated into practice. As discussed in the literature review, a great deal of theorizing in the field of education (Haney & McArthur, 2001; Pajares, 1992; Richards & Lockheart, 1994) has been done over the years focusing on educators' beliefs in relation to teacher self-efficacy, student success, and developmentally appropriate practice in both preschool and elementary levels. An area that has received very little attention is research into ECE educators' beliefs about play. Understanding the role educators' beliefs play in pedagogy and how these beliefs are manifest in the classroom is useful to the field of education more widely and the Canadian context more specifically. Adopting educators' beliefs as the primary focus of attention will help me better understand the current research questions.

Teacher Beliefs

As demonstrated in the literature review, various conceptualizations about "beliefs" exist, ranging from definitions separating beliefs from knowledge, values and personal lived

experiences (Pajares, 1992; Sanger & Osgusthorpe, 2011) to those combining beliefs with values and previous knowledge (Pajares, 1992; Rokeach, 1968). Given the multiplicity of conceptualizations, it is imperative to provide a consistent and operational definition of “teacher beliefs” that will be utilized in this study.

Operational definition of beliefs. Drawing from Lewis’ (1990) conceptualization, the origin of all knowledge is rooted in belief; therefore knowledge is rooted in one’s personal beliefs. Rokeach (1968) has defined beliefs as “any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does, capable of being preceded by the phrase, ‘I believe that’” (p.113), thus suggesting that beliefs can be exhibited both through communication as well as actions. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to operationally define beliefs combining both Lewis (1990) and Rokeach’s (1968) definitions which posit that knowledge is rooted in beliefs; therefore I am proposing that an educators’ knowledge is rooted in beliefs about certain constructs, such as child development (related specifically to their training in ECE), research on the benefits of play, as well as their own experiences (including personal values which are influenced by upbringing, experiences prior to training and post training). Using this definition, I am assuming that a) the choices educator’s make are an expression of their beliefs and values, (b) educator intentions (the things they intend to do in the classroom) also reflect their own beliefs, and (c) educator attitudes are value stances (attitudes reflect personal values about how they think children learn, best way to set up the classroom for optimal learning) which equally reflect their beliefs. ECE educators’ play beliefs hold an important role in their choices, intentions, and attitudes towards play.

Framework: Teacher Beliefs

Origins of beliefs. Educator beliefs are not developed in a vacuum, nor are they constructed in isolation. Educator beliefs are developed through a myriad of experiences over

the course of their lives. Among these experiences are the various social interactions with other individuals (i.e., parents, family, children, colleagues, through training, etc.) as well and personal practice (Richards & Lockheart, 1994). As educators dialogue with others, and become active participants in their environments, they expose their beliefs and hear others in turn, which contributes to the ongoing shaping of their beliefs. Beliefs, like all knowledge, emerges from and are constructed in the crucible of dialogue (Gergen, 1994). So too for educators, whose beliefs are shaped through conversations with one another in addition to other experiences both prior to and after training. As educators communicate with one another regarding thoughts, theories and perspectives, they are contributing to the ongoing development of their own beliefs (Potter & Jacques, 1997). When an individual makes sense of their own beliefs (being able to express why they have made specific choices or what leads their beliefs) this is inherently a form of communal participation (Potter & Jacques, 1997).

This thesis incorporates three key angles which relate to the development of beliefs. First, I will explore pre-service experience (personal history, values, memories about play) and post-service experience (after training and in practice) in the life of an ECE educator. Second, I will discuss the notion of core beliefs and peripheral beliefs in the overall development of an educator's beliefs about play. Third, I will reflect on the significance of espoused beliefs versus actualized beliefs (the notion of praxis as discussed in the literature review).

Pre-Service and Post-Service Beliefs

Pre-service experience. Typically in the field of ECE the term pre-service experience relates specifically to beginning teachers 'in-service' experience. However, for the purpose of this research I have chosen to use this term to encompass the educators' early experiences prior to training (i.e., personal history, values, memories about play). Therefore the term pre-

service will be used to denote experiences prior to training. In light of their extensive experience as learners, it is reasonable to expect that pre-service educators enter teacher education already possessing 'personal history based beliefs' or what I am "terming" "pre-service experience" (Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999) beliefs about play that have influenced their beliefs about teaching and learning (Anderson, Blumenfield, Pintrich, Clark, Marx & Peterson, 1995; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Smith, 2003). These pre-service experiences are formed through the students' own life experiences, including their childhood upbringing and early play experiences, wider cultural values, previous careers, parenting. Each impacts their personal beliefs about play.

Research suggests that educators come into the classroom with preconceptions about how the world functions. If they are not able to actively engage with the material and concepts, they may very well fail to grasp new concepts and theories and revert back to old ideas once their training is completed (Donovan & Bransford, 2005). It is imperative to become aware of the learner's pre-service experience before they enter the classroom in order to guide them accordingly (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1978). Beliefs encompass understanding and preconceptions (Pajares, 1992). While my goal is not to alter the educators' beliefs, I do want to help distinguish between experiences that have affected their development of play beliefs (pre-service experiences) as this may help us understand what beliefs students have already developed prior to their ECE training.

Post-service experience. While, "post-service experiences" are those experiences that educators are exposed to during and after their official training in Early Childhood Education (this can be both a combination of course work, fieldwork experiences, conferences they have attended) and that have impacted their beliefs about play. There is significant argument that prior knowledge is important in learning to teach, and that educators frequently use new information to confirm and strengthen prior knowledge,

expressed in beliefs (Tillema, 1998). Prior knowledge/beliefs can affect learning in two ways. It may help facilitate learning by “providing a basis for understanding and judging the validity of solutions to problems” (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993, p. 191). It can also impede learning when providing divergent views from those being espoused.

Personal beliefs—both pre-service and post-service—can both “buttress and interfere with learning. They can act as ‘anchors’ and facilitate learning that is congruent with existing knowledge, or can be ‘brittle’ and impede learning when they are inconsistent with knowledge to be learned” (Kagan, 1992, p. 75). The strength of existing beliefs and the possibility of changing currently held beliefs is reflected in the type of beliefs the educator has, whether they be core or peripheral beliefs, this will be discussed further in the section on core and peripheral beliefs.

One must take into consideration a educators’ pre-service (prior to training in ECE) and post-service experiences (after training) as one of the key sources of beliefs (Sanger & Ogusthorpe, 2011). Educators’ belief systems or philosophical principles are often already in place, based on their own pre-service experiences, before they even begin their formal training (Pajares, 1992). Considering that educator beliefs are accrued over a life time of experience, including both pre-service and post-service training (Erickson & Schultz, 1981), it is necessary to consider all possible factors that may influence and affect the beliefs an educator currently holds regarding the relevance of play in ECE. Delineating pre-service from post-service beliefs will offer texture to the exploration of ECE educators’ beliefs and practices of play.

Core (entrenched) and Peripheral Beliefs

A second distinction about beliefs offers additional possibilities for the inquiry into beliefs about play. Haney and McArthur (2001) distinguish two types of beliefs: core (entrenched) beliefs and peripheral beliefs. Studies of pre-service teacher beliefs have

shown that some students hold deeply 'entrenched beliefs' or 'core beliefs' (Ashton & Gregoire-Gill, 2003; Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis, & Purdie, 2002; Chinn & Brewer, 1993) while others hold 'vague' or 'peripheral' beliefs (Winitzky & Kauchak, 1997). Core beliefs are considered to be central to and connected to all other beliefs and are considered to be indisputable as they have been entrenched in the student's life over a long period of time (Haney & McArthur, 2001). Further, these core beliefs are considered to be stable and more resistant to change. Peripheral beliefs on the other hand, are believed to be less influential as they are not engrained in the student from an early age. Peripheral beliefs are disputable, and thus easily replaced with a new belief or theory.

Core beliefs. For the purpose of this study, 'core' beliefs are defined as those beliefs that are both stated and enacted. These beliefs are strongly connected to each other, and are more resistant to change, since they are what guide the educator in terms of the choices they make, actions they take in the classroom (Haney & McArthur, 2001). These core beliefs have been developed over time, in various contexts, and have been implemented into the educators' main assumptions as to how children learn and develop, as well as their role as an educator (impacted most by pre-service experiences) (Haney & McArthur, 2001). It is important to analyze the educators' core beliefs, as these are influential in decisions they make regarding play.

Information educators encounter early on is rooted in their core beliefs, as this is the raw material from which they make inferences about themselves, their surroundings, and their circumstances (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief system, the more challenging it is to alter these beliefs. As time passes, an individual will hold onto their core beliefs and they will continue to solidify. Core beliefs are very powerful and help individuals identify with one another, as well as form groups and social systems (i.e. political parties, religious affiliations, educational beliefs)

(Pajares, 1992).

Peripheral beliefs. 'Peripheral' beliefs on the other hand, are defined as beliefs that are stated but not enacted (Haney & McArthur, 2001). Hence, these beliefs are not necessarily acted on in practice. Peripheral beliefs may be more easily influenced and changed, as they are not at the core of one's beliefs. These beliefs are considered to be easily disputed and changed or altered through conversations, as they are not believed to be central to the students' core beliefs and values.

I would expect that given that Haney and McArthur (2001) posit that core beliefs are developed over a lifetime, that these will be the beliefs that will inform educators' choices about play pedagogy as well as the actions they take in the classroom. Beliefs are instrumental in the choices educators make on a daily basis (i.e., physical layout of the classroom, materials used in the classroom, as well as the activities set out and organized) (Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980) and are an important part of this analysis.

An important element in the development of play beliefs is understanding how these beliefs are interpreted and understood by the educator. Beliefs shape how pre-service educators interpret and respond to information and experiences during teacher training (Chong & Low, 2009) and can act as 'filters' through which they interpret and view others' teaching (Kagan, 1992). Core beliefs are considered more difficult to alter as they have been instilled from a very young age and often can act as a filter when interpreting new information. Therefore, it is important to analyze the educators' cases in relation to their core beliefs and their peripheral beliefs, as this may help me understand why some beliefs are stated but not enacted. In addition, the process of learning about teaching involves 'filtering' new information through existing beliefs systems before transforming it and making it part of their own approach (Bullough, 1991; Kagan, 1992). Kagan (1992) states that "personal

beliefs function as the filter and foundation of new knowledge” (p. 75). The filtering role of prior knowledge and beliefs therefore, has a potentially critical impact on pre-service educators’ learning during formal teacher education.

Espoused Beliefs vs. Practiced Beliefs (Praxis)

Another important part of this framework is the analysis of espoused beliefs about play and the actual application of these beliefs in practice. It has been argued by many theorists and researchers that educators have difficulty in translating espoused beliefs into practice (Michelet, 1986). As a result, there appears to be a gap between what educators actually say they believe about play and what they do inside the classroom. Charlesworth and her colleagues (1991) have suggested that strong beliefs can impact the beliefs-action relationship (when educators have strong views there is a tendency to follow through with these beliefs in practice). While others have found that there seems to be a discrepancy between what the educators state as their beliefs and what they actually practice in the classroom (Christie & Wardle, 1992; Roskos & Christie, 2002; Saracho, 1994) or more specifically praxis (translating theory into practice) (Schön, 1990; Michelet, 1986). Beliefs may not directly impact/predict behaviour, however they do play an important role in filtering new information. Therefore, understanding how beliefs have been developed and nurtured through a variety of experiences is important in this current study.

In the Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) model they draw our attention to an important link between beliefs and actions. In their model they suggest that beliefs are influenced by attitudes, then intentionality, and finally behaviour. Particular attention is paid to what Dewey (1933) calls reflective practice (i.e., the act of reflecting on and then practicing ideas) in this study as educators define their beliefs and reflect on how these beliefs are acted on in

practice. Further, the relevance of reflection extends to what Schön (1990) terms as 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' as important aspects of how educators describe their play beliefs and later reflect them in practice. In this study I do not assume that knowing the content of educators' beliefs will necessarily predict what they do in practice, however analyzing how educators' beliefs may get translated into practice can lead to more informed discussions as to why educators hold certain beliefs, where they come from and how they are enacted (Green, 1971, 1998).

The pedagogical benefits of encouraging pre-service and in-service educators to reflect on beliefs, ideas, skills, and theories before, during, and after teaching, has been supported by research (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Reflection assists educators in translating learning into practice. This reflective process is a major aspect of this study, which invites educators to reflect on their own beliefs regarding play and to explain how these beliefs become translated into actual classroom practice.

In using an educators' beliefs perspective, it is imperative to view educational beliefs as connected to, and part of a larger belief system (Pajares, 1992). In order to accurately explore educators' beliefs it is necessary to use procedures such as open-ended interviews and observations of behaviors to capture richer more accurate details.

Constructivist Philosophy

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), "epistemology asks, how do I know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Every epistemology...implies an ethical - moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher" (p. 157). It is important for the researcher to be conscious of the frameworks they use, and the assumptions upon which they are based. I selected constructivism as an epistemological position associated with postmodernism, as the standpoint for engaging in my research.

Constructivism seemed like a natural fit for this study, because the study is focused on teacher beliefs, and constructivism understands knowledge and beliefs as intimately interwoven due to the subjective nature of experience. From a constructivist perspective, a research study is understood as an exercise in the *construction*, more so than the mere *discovery*, of knowledge. In the following section I will describe postmodernism and explain why constructivism is a good fit for this research study.

Postmodernism has been described by Gitlin (1990) as the move away from homogeneity, singularity, predictability, and objectivist principles valued by modernism, towards what Gonzalez, Biever and Gardner (1994) claim as a social consciousness of multiple perspectives and belief systems. Thus, postmodernists hold that there is no universal or objective truth and that knowledge is an expression of the values and beliefs of particular communities in which we live. This movement is based on the premise that reality is subjective and based on multiple experiences taking into consideration culture, time and context (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

Drawing from postmodern epistemology, I have chosen constructivism to make sense of the early childhood educators' beliefs about play because of the appropriateness of a number of its underlying assumptions, including its relativist ontology, subjective epistemology, and hermeneutic methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Relativist ontology. Relativist ontology is preoccupied with the following question “What is there that can be known?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While the word “ontology” suggests the nature of being, the addition of “relativist” is a reminder that nature itself is a function of the perceiving subject. Informed by a constructivist epistemology, the “realities” which emerge from the interactions of researcher and the respondents are regarded as multiple and socially constructed (Kvale, 1995; Smith, 1983). The relativist aspect of constructivism reminds us that knowledge emerges from context, and contexts

are always multiple. As Kvale (1995) says, “all concepts of knowledge, truth, reality and goodness are relative to a specific framework, form of life, and culture” (p. 23).

Constructivism refers to the process by which reality is created by the observer, hence reality is created by a person's active experience of it (Von Glaserfeld, 1988; Watzlawick, 1984).

Subjectivist epistemology. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), a subjectivist epistemology poses the question: “What is the relationship of the knower to the known?” (p.83). The subjectivist epistemology associated with this study encourages an informal and collaborative relationship between researcher and participants, who stand alongside each other in the quest to generate useful knowledge (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Smith, 1983). The process is transactional in the way the researcher's questions, observations, and comments influence the participant's actions, whereas the participants' responses influence the meaning and interpretation that is ascribed by the researcher. Using constructivist inquiry the researcher-participant relationship is characterized by trust, collaboration, shared knowledge, and mutuality of purpose. My own experiences with play both in my personal and practical life influenced the types of questions that I asked and the relationship that I developed with the participants. The participants' experiences prior to training and post-training also shed a light on the direction of the questions during the interviews and the interpretation of the data throughout the study.

Co-Construction of knowledge. Another key feature of constructivist epistemology is its emphasis on the joint creation of meaning that happens through dialogue. In a research study, the researcher and participants approach the topic at hand from their unique contextual positions, such that data collection and analyses result in *co-constructed* interpretations reflecting the contributions of both participants and researchers.

In the current research I co-constructed knowledge of educators' beliefs about play with them. Each educator brought with them their own experiences with play through childhood, early childhood training and through their own practice. Each of these experiences helped construct their own understanding and beliefs about play. At the same time, my curiosity and the questions associated with it provoked reflections that might not otherwise have arisen for the participants.

These observations reflect the qualities of a constructivist methodology, which is both hermeneutical and dialogical. The nature of constructivism suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and adapted only through interactions between and among the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These constructions are then interpreted using a variety of techniques and are compared and contrasted through face-to-face interactions. The goal is to provide a construction that is agreed upon and that adds to the field, often leading to reconstruction of previously held constructions. The interactions between the participants and myself were cyclical in that each step of the process brought us back to the original questions. Through active dialogue in the interviews and through on-going participation we were able to keep the conversation moving back and forth between the educators' beliefs about play and how they came to develop these beliefs and put them into practice.

Chapter IV: Methodology

In this section I will describe the rationale for the methodology used in this research, namely a case study methodology. Second, the overview used for the methods will be explained. Third, participant recruitment will be discussed. Fourth, a detailed description of the data collection techniques will be provided, including memo writing, and transcripts from two interviews, one assisted with IPR along with the procedure. Fifth, the procedures used to analyze the data will be discussed. Finally, a detailed description of the methods used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study will be delineated.

Case Study

The purpose of a case study is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about a particular case. A case study is defined as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in text” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Case studies involve the collection of comprehensive information about a participant or a small group, frequently including the accounts of the subjects themselves.

A case study enabled me to explore multiple cases (4 classrooms with one educator each) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Each case is bound by time and place, and the educators’ beliefs of play and their implementation of these beliefs in practice is being studied. The interest is in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p.10).

By adopting a case study, the similarities and differences among the four participants’ experience of play were clearly documented and brought to the forefront. The case study enabled me to illuminate and foreground the participants’ beliefs about play. As the participants shared their own beliefs they were also able to explore and reflect on specific

experiences that have influenced those beliefs. Further, the case study provided the educators' with voices to speak to me about how they engaged with play theories and conceptualizations during their training, as well as during their classroom practice. Each educator brought to the foreground their own personal history, background knowledge, traits, and different characteristics.

Two phases are involved in this case study. The first phase is called a "within-case analysis" where a detailed description of each case is presented. The second phase involves a "cross-case analysis" where the similarities and differences among the four cases are highlighted and discussed (this phase will be discussed in detail in the procedures section). This process provides very rich descriptions of the educators' beliefs, knowledge, and practice.

According to Merriam (1998), a case study "helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). When a researcher chooses to disrupt the natural setting by changing or adapting the environment, participants no longer behave or respond in the same nature (Merriam, 1998). The case study enabled me to observe the educators in their own natural surroundings without disrupting the flow of the day. It is extremely important that the educators felt at ease and comfortable in their own environment. According to Hatch (1995), knowledge is most adequately achieved in a natural setting. The participants are able to carry on with daily activities promoting learning and development in their classrooms. A case study methodology best answered my research questions exploring the "how" question associated with ECE educators' construction of play beliefs and practice.

A case study proved to be a beneficial methodology in this study for the following reasons:

(1) a case study served the research questions. Exploring the educator's beliefs and experiences with play allowed for much rich open-ended data to be constructed; further, the questions were in turn informed by a qualitative teacher beliefs framework.

(2) a case study represented the participants in their natural settings. The educators were interviewed and observed in their natural classroom environment. A teacher beliefs qualitative paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) "assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures." (p. 31). This framework enables the participants to perform and dialogue in their natural setting (classroom with the children) as co-participants in the research process exploring their realities concerning play beliefs and practice.

(3) a case study represented the participants' experiences with play in some fullness (as opposed to narrowly controlling the setting with operationalized variables) by combining interview and observational data. Important to a qualitative framework is the notion that research is not something separate from life, as implied by contrived and artificial experiments, but rather is seen as being in dynamic interaction with life (Creswell, 2002). Through an interactive interviewing procedure, a research participant and researcher engage in the construction of case study narratives on beliefs and practices of play. Further, discourses are performed and in order to get a broader picture of the participants' "constructions," it was necessary to view them in action as well as talking with them (through interviews); and

(4) a case study enables the participants to share their stories and classroom practice over time (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Here, narrative plays a key role as a vital agent of change (Romanoff, 2001). Within conversational process, participants engage in an open dialogue of perspectives on play performance and knowledge through which meaning can

emerge over time. The educators are able to share experiences and stories throughout the process enabling more rich details to develop.

Hence, the research process centers on the participants' performance and negotiation of meaning in the context of their relationships. Further, a case study enabled me to close the hierarchical gap between the researcher and researched to move towards an egalitarian and participatory relationship by giving the participants control in category development. Hence, the process moves towards a collaborative encounter. (Kvale, 1995). The distinction between researcher and subjects becomes blurred: all are participants in their mutual involvement and joint search for understanding and meaning through dialogue. All are co-participants in the collaborative process of shared inquiry and interpretation (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Anderson, 1997).

Based on the above mentioned objectives, I chose to adopt a case study methodology informed by a qualitative framework informed by educators' beliefs and using a constructivist philosophical back drop to address my research questions.

Methods

Below I will describe the methods used in this research study.

Gaining entry. In order to gain entry into the field, I visited 12 CPE's in the greater metropolitan area of Québec and explained the purpose of my study to the directors. I had already established contact with each of these centres as a result of my MA work, and personal contacts. I left the consent forms with the directors and invited the educators who were interested in participating to contact me personally. I then spoke directly with each educator to explain the purpose of the study, to ensure that they made an informed voluntary decision to consent to participate (See Appendix A, B, C, D, E).

Participants

I used purposeful sampling, recruiting educators who were knowledgeable, and who had in-depth experience with the topic at hand (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 1980). Several daycare directors were contacted and provided with a letter recruiting interested participants (see Appendices A and B). Educators who were interested in participating contacted me via telephone and a date and time was decided upon for our first meeting (see Appendix C). During this meeting the educators were given copies of the parental/guardian letter and consent form to be distributed to parents/guardians for the videotaped classroom processes (Appendix D, E). The participants were four female ECE educators who had graduated within the last eight years from the same English speaking College in the greater Metropolitan area of Québec. The participants varied in age from 25-32 years of age. Two participants graduated from the Intensive 1-year Attestation program in ECE and two of the participants graduated from a 3-year Diplome D'Etudes Collegiales (DEC) program in ECE. The participants each worked with children between the ages of two and five years of age.

I originally anticipated collecting data from six participants for this case study research; however after careful thought and consideration, I decided this would not be in the best interest of the study. According to Creswell (1998) "the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case" (p. 56). Typically, Creswell (1998) suggests that no more than four cases should be studied at any given time. Therefore, following Creswell's caveat, I decided to use four cases to ensure that I did not lose valuable data. Considering that I am looking at a particular issue, that of the educators' constructions of play beliefs and practice, a case study allowed me to explore the issue at hand.

Data Collection

Data collection comprised the following methods: (1) memo writing, (2) two semi-structured interviews (one completed prior to classroom observation and one following classroom observation assisted by interpersonal process recall), and (3) nonparticipant observation (video capture of classroom processes).

Memo writing. During my initial phase of data collection I used memo writing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to keep a reflective log as I compiled data from the interviews and observational segments of classroom practice. This allowed me to consciously keep track of my thoughts prior to and after both the interviews and observational recordings of the classroom practice. I also found that the memo writing served as a way to deal with the bulk of the data, begin analytic files, and establish preliminary coding schemes.

Semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews were chosen in this study to allow for the co-construction of knowledge. As stated by Seidman (1991): “at the root of in-depth interviewing is the process of making sense and illuminating how individuals make sense out of their experiences” (p. 3). The semi-structured interview format encourages the educators to share their thoughts more openly as they can extend a certain topic or question to give more detail (see Appendix F).

Nonparticipant observation. I chose nonparticipant classroom observations (Bentzen, 2000) for the second part of the data collection phase. I chose not to participate in the daily interactions and activities of the classroom educator; instead I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible to ensure that the daily schedule remained as natural as possible. I chose nonparticipant observational data collection as a supplement to the interview data as it may explain, confirm, or lead to new insights. Typically in a case study methodology, observation is one of the many data collection methods (others include face-to-face interviews, collection of documents) (Creswell, 1998).

Second interview assisted by interpersonal process recall. The next phase involved the use of interpersonal process recall. Interpersonal process recall (IPR) is a qualitative approach that is designed to elicit individuals' conscious-in-the-moment (being witnessed on videotape) yet unspoken experiences as they occur (Clarke, 1997). Typically, interpersonal process recall (IPR) is most commonly used in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy (Clarke, 1997; Elliot, 1986; Paré & Lysack, 2004; West & Clark, 2004), however it has also been employed in other fields; most notably in education related to school teaching. Research on IPR (Kagan, 1992) indicates that integrating this approach into the data collection process can help develop more insightful and knowledgeable educators. This process was adopted in relation to the research questions as a way to elicit useful data on the topic.

IPR allows the researcher to gain insight by directly asking the educator to comment on interactions as they were viewed on the videotape (Clarke, 1997). By adapting the process of IPR in the second interview, my objective was to encourage the educators to engage in additional reflective practice regarding their own beliefs about play. The goal was to help prompt the educators to recall their thoughts and feelings about their classroom practice as we watched the videotapes of that practice together. The use of IPR served an additional role in assisting the educators in becoming more sensitive to and aware of their own interactions in human processes, as well as their early childhood practices.

The video data and the use of interpersonal process recall serves as a rich supplement to the interview data. This affords the participants and myself the opportunity to discuss what is going on in the classroom at that moment, how the play is developing and what the educator's role is in the play. The IPR interview gives each educator an important and valuable role in the research process. By using IPR, the educators are given the opportunity to reflect at a more profound level.

According to Elliot (1986) the extensive recall associated with IPR is thought to be facilitated by several factors. Primarily, by viewing actual sessions of their interactions, the educators are cued to specific ideas and reactions that occurred during the classroom processes that may not have been so easily accessible unassisted. Another advantage of the IPR process is that it slows down the interview conversation, enabling the educator to reflect on what is happening and what feelings are being evoked from the video processes.

According to Elliott (1986), during IPR the interviewer may focus on specific aspects of the session (as they are being witnessed on the videotapes), which may help the educator elicit more in depth reflections on their feelings associated with the moment in question.

Data Collection Steps

Memo writing. The process of memo writing was ongoing throughout the data collection process. Prior to and following my first encounter with the participants I used a separate log book where I would write down my thoughts, questions, and concerns as they occurred. I would often return to this log book to keep me grounded and to remind myself of any probing questions that I had regarding the data collection process. I also used this memo writing as a way to start to track the initial categories that I saw developing through the interview responses.

Semi-structured interview procedure. Each educator participated in approximately a 2-hour semi-structured interview prior to classroom observation. The interviews were tape recorded and conducted in a private room (usually staff room) of each individual center. Each educator was given a pseudonym in order to protect her identity.

The interview questions were semi-structured allowing room for the educators to share personal information with me. The research questions were developed based on the findings of current literature on educators' beliefs of play and classroom practice

(Anning, 1991; Conners, 1978; Cruickshank, 1990; Elbaz, 1983; Ryu, 2003; Ryu & Tegano, 2003; Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Wood & Bennett, 1998). The questions were divided into three main categories: (1) educators' beliefs about play, (2) educators' training, and (3) educators' classroom practice (see interview protocol Appendix F). The main questions were the same for each participant, however depending on educators' responses and interests the list may have expanded in a different direction. I used prompts when needed such as: can you explain more, is there anything else you can think of? I transcribed all interview data myself to ensure that the same procedure was used and also to familiarize myself with the transcripts. I also had experience in this regard as I was hired during my MA degree to transcribe for several research projects in Education.

Member checks. Following each interview (including the interview informed by IPR) the typed transcripts were emailed to each participant for their verification. If any aspect of the transcript did not represent the participant's voice it was sent back to myself for modifications. This process was also ongoing as I continued to send both transcripts and categories back to the participants throughout the analysis as well.

Nonparticipant observation. I videotaped four full days of classroom processes in each participants' classroom over the course of four to six weeks for a total of approximately 32 hours of recorded practice. This nonparticipant observation took place following the first interview with the participants.

The days of observation were pre-arranged with the educators and allowed for a variety of experiences to be videotaped. I tried to place myself in the back of the classroom where I would still have a clear view of all classroom processes, but would not directly influence the flow of the routines. I directed the camera towards the educator as she interacted with each child. I spent time focusing on the interactions between the children

during their play, as well as the interactions of the educators with the children. Each educator was given a copy of the video recordings of the activities in their classrooms at the end of the study. This was a way to thank the educators who shared their play experiences with me so openly. Also, by sharing the video processes with the educators, this enabled the educators to become more aware of their own processes and interactions in the classroom.

Second interview assisted by IPR. In this section I will detail the steps involved in the IPR process. Following the first interview with all four participants I transferred all videotaped recordings of classroom practice onto a DVD to facilitate the process of the second interview assisted by Interpersonal Process Recall. The second interview, which was devoted to IPR, was also open-ended (See Appendix F for prompting questions) and enabled the educators to share their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs about play.

First, I began by asking the participants to once again share their beliefs/values on play. I asked them a few open-ended questions to prompt them on the topic of play, and to help get them back into the frame of mind of an educator in the classroom (see Appendix F for prompts).

The second step involved asking the participants to direct the viewing of the classroom processes by giving them the control of the remote. I informed each participant that all four days of the classroom processes were to be found on the DVD and I invited them to go through the disc and stop at their leisure (the four days were taped in sequence and presented in this sequence on the DVD). On the outside of each DVD, the daily activities were labelled, to help jog the participants' memory of what they did on that particular day (i.e., Tuesday: outdoor spray painting, snow collage, introducing babies to dramatic corner). By labelling the main events that occurred on the DVD, this helped the educator decide which day she wanted to observe and the activities she wanted to discuss. I explained to them that while we were watching the videos of their classroom practice I would invite them

to talk about what they saw and what they were doing in the classroom (we used the video data to help prompt their memories of the experience and the day).

As there were many hours of tape to be viewed on this one DVD, I explained to the participants that they could focus on one particular day or all four days. However, because of time constraints I reminded them that it would be best to choose the sections that spoke to them the most (i.e., when they stopped the tape we would focus on that one segment and then I would ask them if they wanted to move onto the second day or continue on the same day). Considering that there was such a bulk of information to be viewed I explained to the educators that they could revisit the tapes at any point and if needed we could meet again. If they chose for instance to look at a water play activity with babies on Wednesday I helped them find this activity on the DVD. I believe giving them this opportunity made it easier for them to choose only a few sections to discuss, because they knew that they could come back and talk to me at a later point in time.

The third step involved my direct prompting as we observed the classroom activities. I prompted them by asking various questions such as “what was happening here? How did you choose the materials for this activity or center? How did you feel as you watched these processes? What thoughts come to mind? How would you define play in this scenario? What was your role in the play here? Can you tell me more?”

I let the participants lead the discussion and I encouraged them to direct me in terms of what they wanted to talk about. My role in this process was to ensure that the participants were focused on play (i.e., their beliefs, ideas, meaning, practice, training, etc). The IPR interview lasted anywhere from two to four hours depending on the needs/comments/questions of the participant.

I tape recorded and later transcribed the IPR interviews myself. The transcripts of the IPR interviews were not as exhaustive as the transcripts from the first interview because

there were many periods of silence where the educator was reflecting on the viewing of the classroom practices.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to understand, interpret, and report the participants' experiences—in this case, in regards to the ways they constructed play beliefs and how they performed them in practice in relation to their formal training. According to Glesne (1999) “data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make some sense of what you have learned” (p. 130). By working with the data, researchers are able to describe, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link their story to other stories.

In the following section I will outline the different steps involved in the analysis of my data. In order to assess the data accurately and truthfully one must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data collected (Creswell, 2002). As stated by Patton (1990), in the phases of data analysis “the challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 371).

Data analysis involved the following steps: (1) organizing the data, (2) cooperative inquiry, (3) initial collaboration, (4) collapsing codes into themes, (5) within-case study, and (6) cross-case study using a educator beliefs framework to make sense of the data.

Organizing the data. The data analysis occurred on several levels. An important aspect of the data analysis process is organizing the data (Patton, 1990). The organization of the data occurred prior to the actual analysis of the categories. The data were transcribed by myself immediately after each interview. Next, each videotape was viewed and labeled with the activities that occurred on each day, prior to analyses. I then

transcribed the interview data informed by the IPR process. I then verified that the data were transcribed and that there were not any missing links or holes. I also verified that each interview transcript was typed verbatim to ensure for extensive rich data. The next phase in the data organization process was to make four complete copies of all the data. Creswell (1998) suggests that the researcher make one master copy to put away in a locked filing cabinet for safekeeping and three additional copies for analysis.

Once all the data were organized I was ready to commence the data analysis process. Since variations in educators' beliefs about play are the primary focus of my study, I decided to analyze the interviews individually as single cases and then to move towards a cross case analysis. As I was analyzing four separate cases— four educators in four different classrooms, I focused on the rich data that came from each interview individually. Within each case, I developed categories based on the educators' responses regarding beliefs, training, and classroom practice. I indicated the categories on my transcripts (jotted them down in the margins before meeting with educators).

Collaborative approach. Originally I analysed the data (both interviews, and the videotaped observations) using a rigorous case study analysis process for distilling themes advocated by Stake (1995). After significant reflection, I realised that I wanted the educators to be involved in the analysis process as well (helping to co-construct the categories). I wanted to guarantee that my voice did not overshadow the voices of my participants, therefore I chose to adapt my method in a manner that would ensure that the participants contributed actively to the construction of categories. In order to ensure that I was co-constructing the knowledge of the educators' play beliefs and practice I returned to my participants to develop the categories collaboratively with them. I wanted to include the participants' voices, because this comes to a closer representation of their experiences.

Typically, when adopting a collaborative approach to research, professionals as well as non professionals become co-researchers (Patton, 2002). There are various methods that outline a collaborative approach to data collection and analysis namely, “humanistic research” and “heuristic inquiry” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985), “cooperative inquiry” (Heron, 1996), and “participatory action research” (King & Lonquist, 1994a, 1994b). These different approaches encourage joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework to understand and/or solve organizational or community problems (Patton, 2002). Typically cooperative inquiry involves the participants as researchers, in self-evaluation and discovery because they undertake a formal, reflective process for their own development and empowerment. The people who participate in creating something new have a tendency to feel a greater sense of ownership over what has been developed and make greater use of it (Patton, 2002). When participants are deeply involved in the research it becomes their process and empowers them.

Levin (1993) distinguished three purposes for collaborative research: “(1) the pragmatic purpose of increasing the use of findings by those involved as emphasized by, for example, Cousins and Earl (1992); (2) the philosophical or methodological purpose of grounding data in participants’ perspectives; and (3) the political purpose of mobilizing for social action, for example, empowerment evaluation or what is sometimes called emancipatory: research” (Cousins & Earl, 1992, p. 410). In adopting a collaborative theme development approach I became more of a facilitator that supported each educator in this collective inquiry. I acted as a facilitator that recognized and valued the participants’ perspectives and expertise and worked to help the participants recognize and value their own play knowledge and expertise. Further, by adopting a collaborative category development analysis, I acknowledged and helped minimize any status and

power differences between myself and the participants. In sum, my goal was to ensure that the participants' voices were heard, and that they were actively involved in the meaning that evolved from the data collection and analyses.

I believe that cooperative inquiry, a form of participatory qualitative research, most closely resembles the teacher beliefs lens and the constructivist philosophy that guided my shift in the data analysis process. In a cooperative inquiry process, the relationship between researchers and participants is bilateral as they work together as co-participants or co-researchers designing, managing, and drawing conclusions from the research (Heron, 1996). This type of process is defined as research with people rather than on people and it is oriented towards helping those involved in the inquiry to understand their world, develop new and creative ways of looking at things, and to learn how to act to change the things they want to change (Reason, 1994).

Adopting this process ensured that the participants were actively involved in the dialogue as they created their own play categories and helped guide the analysis process. According to Reason (1994) cooperative inquiry is rooted in humanistic psychology (e.g., Maslow, 1968) and focuses on personal and group development. The cooperative inquiry involves processes of (a) defining an area of inquiry, (b) implementing action steps, (c) experiencing the consequences, and (d) learning from the experience (Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

Initial collaboration. In order to follow a cooperative inquiry process and ensure that the participants and myself were co-finders of the categories I needed to contact them and ask them to participate in the process. I originally contacted each participant via email and resent them their transcripts from the interview data. I asked them if they would be so kind as to read through the transcripts and pick out the most salient categories regarding their beliefs, theories, and conceptions of play. It is imperative to

mention here that I sent them the original transcripts. At this point, I had already highlighted in my own transcripts a potential list of categories related to educators' beliefs of play, training, and classroom practice.

Typically in a collaborative approach such as cooperative inquiry I would have encouraged all participants to meet and talk together, however I decided against this approach as I knew some of the educators mentioned the time factor involved in the analysis. They were sent their own original transcripts, and not those of the other participants. I gave them several weeks in which to go through this process, as I did not want to pressure them in any way. However, I explained to them that I believed that their input and involvement was key in capturing their thoughts, beliefs and convictions regarding play beliefs and practice. I encouraged them to contact me via email or by telephone when they were finished and then we set up an individual meeting time at the centers to talk through the categories.

Several weeks following the initial email, I set up a meeting time with each educator individually to discuss the categories they had developed. The meeting took place in a private room at the daycare setting, either in a staff room or a vacant room. The meeting lasted approximately one to two hours depending on the needs of the educator. When we met, I explained to them that I wanted to make sure that I was giving an accurate account of their beliefs and experiences related to play. I explained that I wanted them to be co-participants in this research process and that is why I had asked them to generate their own categories. We sat down with the transcripts and we began to discuss how they came to the categories they had selected. Each participant discussion was limited to the categories that pertained to their particular interview (not the interviews of other participants).

They presented me with their initial list of categories and the copies of the transcripts (taken both from the semi-structured interview and the interview informed by IPR). The

educators had jotted down categories in the margins of their transcripts and underlined certain passages associated with the categories they had developed. The educators' categories were directly jotted down on the transcript pages. We read the categories aloud from the transcripts as they presented them. The educators used particular quotes and descriptions of teaching interactions they had witnessed on the videotapes as examples to support their categories.

Each educator used a similar process by which they determined various categories by the ideas they had articulated in their transcripts, as well as from the videotaped processes. The IPR transcripts from the video excerpts added lots of rich detail that helped the educators articulate their categories.

My role in this process was to serve as an unbiased participant/facilitator in their discussion. I sat through each discussion and I listened to their own thoughts, reflections and ideas on each category that became apparent to them during this process. As they introduced each theme I asked them to explain what encouraged them to pick that category and why (supporting their decisions). As a facilitator in this process I wanted the participants to have the opportunity to share their views. Throughout this sharing process I dialogued with the participants about their categories and encouraged them to reflect on how they came to certain ideas and beliefs about these categories. I was careful not to share my own categories until the educators had the chance to present and share the categories they had highlighted throughout the interview and IPR transcripts.

Collapsing categories with participants. Once the educators individually shared their categories with me, we began to discuss some of the overlap between the generated categories. I met with each educator individually on two separate occasions. On the first occasion, we came up with an initial set of categories based on the categories that individual educator had outlined and my own. I met again two weeks following the first meeting to co-

construct another set of categories with each educator individually. Initially, we had anywhere between 15 and 20 categories per educator. We decided that in order to minimize the large number of categories we could associate the categories by larger overarching ones. For instance, categories such as “learning,” “fun,” and “intrinsic” which had been placed under individual categories by each educator could all be collapsed under one main category titled “Beliefs About Play.” The educators felt that this one main category accurately depicted their beliefs. Throughout this process the educators and I collaboratively developed the categories based upon the interview data taken from both sets of transcripts. The quotes associated with a category derived either from a segment of transcript highlighted by the participant, or highlighted by myself. Obviously, the second interview informed by IPR was rich in that it brought to life particular examples of the educators’ accounts of play. Perhaps the fact that the participants and myself were trained and versed in ECE language helped in the creation of categories. As we collapsed the categories together (the educators’ and my own) into more manageable categories, we ensured that the original quotes per category did not change.

I believe that this was a very liberating process for all members involved, as we were able to co-construct the meaning of play together in a social context. This process engaged the participants by giving them the opportunity to be involved in the development and organization of the categories following a cooperative inquiry process. Rather than imposing meaning on their words; this process fit well with my intentions to co-construct knowledge. Since I am retelling their accounts of play, it was imperative that I empower the participants by becoming active participants in this process.

Within-case study. Part of the case study process involves presenting each individual case called a “within case analysis.” In this part of the research my goal was to present the educators’ beliefs about play sharing their specific ideas and practice associated

with each category. In order to share each educators' account I presented the cases based on the categories we had developed. I presented a brief biography of each participant, and then introduced the categories along with quotations from the interviews, as well as examples that the educators gave to support what they did in the classrooms. In order to verify my cases, I sent a draft of each case to my participants for their feedback. Once I received the feedback and/or suggestions from each educator I adapted the case accordingly.

Cross-case study. Following the within case presentation, I then prepared an analysis across the cases, called a "cross-case analysis" (Creswell, 1998). During the cross-case analysis, I sifted through the categories discussed throughout all four cases in order to illuminate both the similarities and the differences among the educators' lived experiences with play.

During the cross-case analysis, I highlighted the commonalities between the educators, but also elucidated the differences as well. Therefore, the similarities are presented first, between and across the educators followed by the differences in their play beliefs, training and practice. Throughout the cross-case analysis I used the teacher beliefs framework to make sense of the similarities and differences between the educators play beliefs and practice.

Researcher Role Management

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue persuasively that inquiry is never value free, my aim throughout this project has been to remain aware of my own values and beliefs that I bring to the research process (reflexivity). My goal in this process was to interpret the educators' own lived experiences with play. I am aware of my own personal experiences working both as an ECE educator, as well as an ECE educator trainer in College. My personal experiences have informed my own curiosity and this is reflected in my research questions, as well as in what is foregrounded in the participants' experience. I am careful not to privilege my voice over

the educators, as the interpretive process is mutually constituted through our dialogues in the interviews.

Trustworthiness. According to Creswell (2002) qualitative researchers strive to report the participants' experiences as accurately as possible. In doing so, they often ask themselves questions related to the level of believability, accuracy and trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, Merriam (1998) suggests that the researcher be aware of the following: internal validity, reliability, and transferability.

Internal validity. According to Creswell (1998) standards for assessing the credibility of a qualitative study rest with the researcher's ability to accurately interpret the participants' interpretations of a particular phenomena. Creswell's (1998) working definition of internal validity follows "I view verification as a *process* that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed" (p.194). Within a postmodern, interpretive framework it is imperative that the researcher be aware of the credibility of the research process. To establish internal validity Merriam (1998) proposes the following techniques: triangulation (data sources, methods, and investigators), reflexivity, and prolonged engagement in the data collection phase.

Triangulation. In this study I employed a variety of methods in order to ensure that the data was triangulated. First, multiple sources of data were included in the research such as incorporating four case studies (four participants). Second, multiple methods were used to collect the data such as two interviews with participants (one using IPR), classroom observations, as well as memo writing. Third, using an educators' beliefs framework and a collaborative approach to category development allowed for multiple investigators- participants were involved as co-investigators as they did partake in making key decisions about their own categories. The participants were involved in the creation of categories based

on the transcripts they were given from both interviews. I met with each educator individually to discuss the categories that they deemed pertinent in relation to the transcripts. This process was explained in greater detail in the data analysis section.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity in this process refers to the researcher's ability to reflect on their own role as an instrument in the research (Merriam, 1998). Using a educators' beliefs framework and a constructivist philosophy (Haney & McArthur, 2001; Pajares, 1992; Richards & Lockheart, 1994) I am invited to reflect on my own role as co-actor in this research as I take on multiple roles (i.e., researcher, facilitator, educator, college teacher)—using various points of view. A technique that I used to ensure reflexivity throughout this process was the use of memo writing. I kept track of my own ideas and beliefs using a journal throughout the research study. This journal helped serve the overall intent of the project: to delineate educators' own beliefs about play and practice by making sure that I always went back to the participants and made sure they were active participants (i.e., member checks, collaborative category development, IPR process). I believe that this journal was responsible for guiding me in the right direction ensuring that at all times I was true to my methodology, as well as my philosophical stance. Without this journal, I probably would not have been so in tune with my own thoughts and ideas throughout the project.

Prolonged engagement in the data collection phase. Merriam (2002) and Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observation help the researcher build trust with the participants, and help to check for misinformation that may be introduced by the researcher or the participants. According to Fetterman (1998) “working with people day in and day out, for long periods of time, is what gives ethnographic research its validity and vitality” (p. 46). I spent a minimum of six weeks gathering data at each daycare setting. During these six weeks, I was an observer of every

aspect of the daycare routine. This provided me with sufficient time on site to gather the rich experiences that the educators shared on a daily basis in a classroom setting.

Reliability. In a postmodern interpretive study, the concept of reliability is often referred to as the 'dependability' of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Merriam (1998), replication of a qualitative study may be challenging to achieve since: (1) human behaviour is never static, resulting in various responses and temperaments of participants, and (2) there may be a myriad of interpretations based on the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that one way to achieve 'reliability' in qualitative research is to focus on the dependability of the results. The results must reflect the data that was collected. Towards this goal, Merriam (1998) suggests ensuring that the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 1998).

One way that reliability was strengthened in this study was through peer debriefing with my supervisor, where we discussed at great length the raw data collected, data reproduction, theme development, as well as reporting the experiences of the participants in a consistent and authentic way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also, I used member checks throughout the process soliciting the participants' views on: the credibility of the interpretations, findings, as well as the transcripts.

I used member checks throughout the process to ensure that I was accurately representing the participants' voices (Creswell, 1998). Member checks enabled the participants to share and optimize their voices through this journey (Creswell, 1998). Following each completed transcription of the interview data, I sent the transcripts via email to each participant for verification. I asked them each to read over the interview data and to inform me if any changes were necessary (i.e., if the transcription was incorrect or the meaning of the response was not what they had intended). If they felt that part of the interview responses did not capture what they meant to say they requested that I edit that

section of the transcripts. Once I made any suggested edits I would then again re-send the edited section to the participants for a final adjustment and verification. This was done for both interviews with all four participants after each phase of transcription and throughout the collaboration of categories.

Transferability. In general, many qualitative studies are criticized for their lack of objectivity and generalizability (Polit & Hungler, 1997). The aim to generalize to a specific population is not the main objective in qualitative research instead the goal is to share an accurate depiction according to the participants' stories. If one were to attempt to replicate a qualitative study they may find this quite a chore considering the challenge finding the same participants, as some participants may communicate more openly than others— thus yielding very different results (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) claims that the aim in qualitative research is on “producing research that can inform and enhance reader's understandings” (p.70). The term “generalizability” can therefore be replaced by the term ‘transferability’ in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way that transferability can be achieved is through the use of rich, thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Lincoln & Guba (1985) claim that rich, thick description allows the reader to make their own decisions on the transferability of the study.

I did not attempt to generalize to any larger population, that of early childhood educators in Québec. I used rich, thick description in each case by describing the participants' experiences with detailed and vivid illustrations. By doing so, the readers are able to determine themselves whether the findings can be ‘transferred’ to other settings because of “shared characteristics” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 32). Using the rich descriptions allows the readers to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes.

Chapter V: “Play is what we do all the time” (Adrienne, 2006).

In the following section I will present Adrienne’s background information, along with her play beliefs and specific examples from her practice. All names are pseudonyms in order to preserve the participants anonymity.

Adrienne

Adrienne, is a 32-year-old woman living in a suburban area in a large Metropolitan city of Québec. Her mother tongue is English, however she speaks fluent French, Spanish, and sign language. She learned sign language while working with children with special needs in both daycare and elementary school. Adrienne was born and raised in Canada; however, her family composition is made up of a mix of British and South American heritage (Hispanic/Anglo).

In terms of her educational background, Adrienne completed a Bachelors degree in History with a minor in English and then continued her studies at the College level completing her Attestation in 2.5 years in Early Childhood Education (graduating in June, 2005). As we discussed her experiences working with children, Adrienne explained that even while she was pursuing her Bachelors degree in History, she always chose elective courses related to education such as: “courses for children, music for children, literature for children, gross motor gymnastic.” Adrienne has worked with children in different capacities for the past twelve years ranging from ages 18 months to grade six. However, she explained that the main focus of her experience is with the 3- to 5-year-old groups. Currently, she works in the 4- to 5- year-old classroom at a CPE in the suburbs and is completing her fourth year with this age group.

Adrienne is a huge admirer of books and can sit for hours reading many different types of books, especially children’s literature. She explained her passion here as she giggled, “I love, I mean my mom laughs because I am always, you know... I show up

and my brother works for a book company. So, I come home with all those books. She's like 'don't you ever buy grown up books?'"

The interview, observations, and debriefing session provided a well-rounded picture of this early childhood educator's beliefs about play, as well as how she practices these beliefs in the classroom. Throughout the analysis, several categories were co-constructed between myself and Adrienne, which demonstrated her beliefs of play in an early childhood context. From her interview, we developed six overarching categories that were salient for Adrienne: (a) play beliefs impacted by memories of play; (b) beliefs about play; (c) the educator's beliefs about her role in play; (d) beliefs about the role of the environment in play; (e) impact of training experiences on beliefs; (f) beliefs about the overall benefits of play; and (g) educator beliefs about play as a result of parent convictions.

In the following section, I will address each of the separate categories and discuss the sub-categories developed throughout the case.

Impact of Memories on Beliefs About Play

Childhood. Adrienne described how her own memories of play as a child impacted her current beliefs of play. She began by telling me about her early memories as a child and said, "We didn't have a lot of toys. There was a lot of going to the park. We were in all these different countries; so like playing at the beach, playing in the mountains, playing in someone else's backyard." She continued to explain that she did not attend daycare as a child, so her memories were of her time spent with her family, her siblings and her dogs.

She spent a great amount of time outdoors "I remember travelling with my parents, running through the fields, playing at the beach and exploring all that nature had to offer." She believes that these positive memories have impacted her own beliefs about play. She explains "this is why I now want the children in my class to have the same experiences in

their play.” Adrienne feels that the play experiences she had outdoors playing with “branches, leaves, making forts in the woods” has contributed to her understanding that the learning environment not only encompasses the classroom, but the surrounding world as well. As she got older, she believed that her play began to shift towards more “creative materials, such as paints, crayons, chalk”...but again she mentioned that there were not a lot of toys. She and her siblings created their own materials from things they had around the house such as: scrap pieces of clothing, paper, cardboard, twigs, etc.

Adrienne recalls lots of make-believe play “I remember playing with my brother making forts out of blankets, rocket ships with the chairs...we could turn a pot into an airplane.” She confirms the impact of these experiences here “these experiences, engaging in imaginative play, the things I used to do has really helped me in my classroom today.”

Adrienne states “this is why, you know in my classroom there are no boundaries for play. The kids can play with the materials anyway they want...the world is theirs to explore.” She believes in encouraging the children to play with the materials safely, but in any fashion they would like.

Adolescence and adulthood. As Adrienne got older, her play began to shift towards more organized team sports such as swimming, volleyball, and tennis. She remembered having to take piano lessons but did not equate this with play, as she said it was not fun, but work. Adrienne believes that there was a clear division between play and work for her as she explains “as I got older my play changed you know, I had to do things I didn’t want like piano. So this for me was more like work than play because I didn’t want to do it.” She believes that these experiences helped her define the difference between play and work “I know what is play and what is work, and I think about this when I plan activities.” This distinction between play and work seems to have impacted her current beliefs about the difference between play and work. She also explained that as she got older the types of play

she engaged in changed, as did her interests. She explains that “play changes you know, as we get older our interests and our games change as we do.” Now, as an adult she said she still plays but with the children in her classroom. She also plays with her dogs at home, and with board games such as scrabble, cranium and other mentally challenging social games.

When I asked Adrienne if she felt her memories of play influenced her current beliefs she said “Yeah, uh I think definitely. I want my kids now, in the classroom, but in the future my own kids, as well, to have the same experiences I did. I thought they were very useful. Like, you need to realize yourself, there is always something to do, and it can always be fun. And it’s always a learning opportunity, and it should be outside as much as possible.” Adrienne posits that her play beliefs were impacted by her childhood experiences and these are experiences that she continues to hold dear even today.

In addition to sharing her thoughts about the importance of childhood play for shaping the way adults value play, Adrienne spoke extensively about what she sees as valuable in the process of play itself. Her observations are summarized in the next section “Beliefs About Play.”

Beliefs About Play

Exploration. As Adrienne dialogued with me during the IPR process, she explained that in order to develop play beliefs one must experience play first hand (i.e., through childhood experiences with play, in school, with peers, with family). According to Adrienne, play can mean different things to different people. Play in her words “cannot be defined in one single definition.” The category of exploration became apparent to Adrienne, as well as myself, through the analysis of the detailed transcripts and during the IPR process.

In Adrienne’s experience, as an ECE educator, and as an individual, she believes play has many elements. One key focus that emerged during our conversations, however, was that play essentially is the need for the child to learn through exploration. She explains here:

...for exploration, I think it may be that when we talk about learning and exploration in young children, we often call it play, even though they just may be putting something in a bucket and taking it out again, and putting it in and taking it out again. Yah, they are exploring lots of things, like physics, while they are doing it—we could call that play.

As described here by Adrienne, she thinks play involves learning through exploration and discovery. When the child explores through the use of various media there is a certain exploratory factor involved in this process. This belief of play and learning through exploration was evident during the videotaped classroom observations. During one session later reviewed with Adrienne, we observed the exploratory dimension of play described by Adrienne's play beliefs as boy, R, was mesmerized by the tactile sense of exploring the shaving cream and adding food colouring to it. Another example of this type of exploration was when she observed R plunge his hands into the shaving cream and he said, "look it makes yellow, it's like a yellow light!" Here, Adrienne affirmed that R was clearly "...demonstrating exploration and discovery through his meaning making." As we watched this sequence on video, Adrienne clarified that she believes that R was exploring and making new discoveries.

Pleasure. Adrienne understands play as being about how children, "live their lives and how they learn through various exchanges and interactions with the environment and with people." She explained as we reviewed one segment of the classroom processes, that she believes play is tied to a pleasure factor for the child. "Play is something that needs to be pleasurable, it is within the child. It is not something that the child is forced to do." In her understanding of play experiences, she believes strongly that play is the product of an inborn pleasure mechanism for the child. She explains this belief further:

I think it is simply what they do; I think it is intrinsically motivated a lot of the time.

That they [children] can enter into play with somebody from the outside, so it is something playful. But, I also think that there is pleasure involved in the activity.

Adrienne continued to explain that she believes play is something that children do for pleasure. Play is not something that is forced or can be forced on the child—the child must have a “stake” in it; it must be intrinsically motivated. She continued to stress that “I think generally once the child is not interested and involved in enjoying it [the play], he stops doing it as an activity.” She continued to describe her beliefs in a similar vein, “play can have many meanings, but it is when children are engaged and excited, that they are going to learn much better than if they feel the pressure to.” Adrienne believes play is all about the pleasure factor for children, “once play ceased to be fun, it can then be classified as work.”

Adrienne also commented on a video excerpt, in which she referred to her own beliefs of play as pleasure in relation to what she reinforces in the classroom play. During one activity, a boy named M was manipulating a Styrofoam piece in his right hand and held a saw in his left hand. He gently sawed a piece off and held it up and exclaimed “I cut this piece off, see!” Adrienne described here that this was an example of her own beliefs of how pleasure took hold of the play and engaged the child in the exploration through intrinsic motivation. Adrienne believes that children follow their inborn instincts to engage in play, “these instincts ultimately were related to pleasure.” She explained her beliefs further by telling me that “these inborn instincts to play, were stronger than extrinsic motivation, because the child was engaging in play purely from desire”, as opposed to being influenced by peers or other educators.

Learning. During my various conversations with Adrienne, a third concept emerged from our dialogue—namely, that Adrienne believes that play is a means of learning and exposure to new ideas and concepts. Adrienne strongly believes that children learn while

they are manipulating and exploring. She explains this belief here, “play is how kids learn. It’s how they live their lives. But I really believe it’s every moment of every day there’s a learning opportunity.”

Adrienne once again referred back to the video of her classroom processes to share her beliefs in practice as R played in the classroom. She referred to one moment, as he walked over to the construction site in the classroom, picked up a red hat and placed it on his head. R then picked up the red tool kit with his left hand and walked backwards towards Adrienne who was sitting at the table. R said to Adrienne “I am going to work.” In watching this sequence, Adrienne described this, as reaffirming her belief of R’s learning as he took on the role of a construction worker. Adrienne believes that this play scenario demonstrated his learning of adult roles and specific careers—a “construction worker” in this case. Adrienne believes that an important element in defining and explaining the meaning of play is learning. She describes this belief here, “because they will learn many things— they will learn literacy and the science things. They will learn through their exploration and play in that kind of environment.”

Further, Adrienne believes that play simply cannot be defined or understood by observing or reading about it in a text book. Adrienne’s beliefs and experiences seemed to reveal that “this is how our children learn; through play they explore and develop skills and master new skills.” According to Adrienne, she believes that the role of the teacher is to facilitate this learning, which is described in a later section.

Overall development. Throughout our time together, Adrienne reinforced the belief that play is important in the children’s overall development. She believes that as children play, they are able to develop social, emotional, cognitive, language, motor, and aesthetic skills. Here she expresses this conviction:

It's the biggest influence on them, because that is all they are doing all day, is playing and exploring. And it impacts their body and how they develop their gross and fine motor skills. Obviously, it impacts their cognitive, their problem solving skills, their vocabulary. You know, 'yes you're playing with dinosaurs. Can we learn different names of dinosaurs or leaves? Today my kids were you know raking leaves and they were standing up and going 'there's a birch leaf and there's a maple leaf.' I was not asking them to identify them. But through doing the puzzles, doing craft activities, reading stories and going on walks, they pick up and then they learn. And they're proud of themselves that they know they can give you a piece of information which then leads to all kinds of great communication skills and respect; that someone is willing to listen to you. And that you have something to offer.

Adrienne elaborated further on her beliefs about play and overall development as she referred to a videotaped activity of making pretzels. Here, the children had been learning about bakers and had just finished story time, listening to one of their favourite stories about making pretzels. Adrienne finished the story by asking the children what ingredients they would need to make their own pretzels? The children shouted out various ingredients such as flour, water, oil, and yeast. Adrienne then asked them if they would like to make their own pretzels and they all shouted with glee. After washing their hands, the children filed into their seats at the table.

As we continued to watch the tape, Adrienne explained her beliefs in terms of the overall development she saw going on through this play experience. She believed that the children were engaged in a tactile experience and also learning to take turns as part of being a good citizen and friend. "They have to act at being patient. You know? Or not getting exactly what they wanted. If somebody wanted to crack the eggs, but you know, if I was, I happened to be going around in a circle giving directions. So, if I get to the eggs first on the

recipe, you may not get that turn.” For Adrienne this excerpt represents her beliefs about play and the children’s social development.

During this cooking experience the children engaged in self-discovery; learned what they could do on their own and developed a sense of self-worth. As we continued to watch the children on the videotape, Adrienne shared her beliefs about the development she saw going on as the children were busy communicating and problem-solving, as they tried to measure the ingredients needed for the recipe, thus learning math concepts and chemistry. She expressed further her play beliefs regarding overall development:

There’s some math skills and problem-solving. There’s fine motor also; being able to roll it and I think being able to make it. Some of them made them into balls, whatever they may be. Hum, there’s a lot of communication and vocabulary, especially with the pretzels and baking soda.

Adrienne believes that “not all learning is a result of direct teaching or adult intervention, quite often the children learn through self-discovery and lived experiences.”

Adrienne picked out another salient example, from the classroom videotaped activities, of an example where her beliefs about play and overall development come to life in her classroom. In this example one boy asked Adrienne to help him start building a skating rink using Lego pieces. He explained to Adrienne that a skating rink was inside a building and, therefore, he needed to figure out how he could replicate this in his play. He decided that to make his rink a reality, he would need to make it part of a larger building. He took the rink and placed it underneath one of the tables in the classroom and expressed that now his rink was indoors. Adrienne explained that this is what she believes happens in play: different forms of development transpire through the play: “communication, the problem solving, and of course it touches on generally the fine motor, colour recognition.” She believes that this type of play could also result in a great deal of imaginary (i.e., pretend

play) development for the children, "You know someone has to go into that play scenario. It's a whole new dimension. The children have to then enter that new place of imagination."

Next, on the videotaped classroom activities, Adrienne stops at a point on the tape where the children were busily engaged in water play. She tells me that this experience supports her beliefs in the importance of play and the development of the overall child. She describes how she set up this activity to allow for play through exploration. Some of the children were using funnels to observe the pouring capacities involved, whereas others were washing the ladles and the cups. Adrienne called this activity "a perfect example of tactile play." She explained that for this activity, she had chosen to place different types of measuring equipment in the water basin to stimulate the children's interests. She also mentioned that on some days she just adds food colouring and lets the children explore with mixing the colour combinations and how one colour changed when added to another, thus providing opportunities for learning about primary and secondary colours, and basic principles of chemistry.

Adrienne continued to express how this activity really focused on her beliefs about play and overall development. As the children continued to explore in their water play, Adrienne described this pre-math activity as "being able to recognize the different amounts and also to practice pouring with the ladle a little bit." As the children became increasingly engaged and used different sizes of ladles to scoop up the water, we saw the children taking turns and working together. Adrienne identified the critical language and social development of one child in particular: "Again, look at C who has such a language barrier can still communicate with I. Like that's great!"

We now turn to Adrienne's beliefs about the educator's role in play.

Educator's Beliefs About their Role in Play

Through our many dialogues and encounters, a second belief surfaced: the relevance of “the educator’s role in play.” Based on Adrienne’s experience, she believes that more constructive developmentally appropriate rich play occurs with the involvement of the educator in the classroom. In this particular case, she believes that the educator’s role in any ECE classroom is to be observant and cognizant of the children’s play. Adrienne believes that in order to help stimulate and develop the child’s play, the educator must know how to step into the play, and how to help the child develop their skills in the classroom. An important aspect for Adrienne, in her beliefs about her role in the children’s play, was knowing how and when to act as a model.

Modeling. Adrienne believes that as an educator she needs to know how to model and join in the children’s play. Adrienne believes that as a model in the play, she must help the children know how to join and enter a play sequence appropriately: “I am a role model for the children, they watch me and learn from my actions.” She believes that sometimes, children want an adult to join in their play, but also she knows that at other moments, she needs to be able to step out of that play. Adrienne believes that she needs to be careful not to overstep boundaries as she models and joins in the play, and only does so when she feels it is appropriate. Her belief is that modelling is linked to the ability to observe the children’s needs and then respond accordingly. She links this belief to an episode on the videotaped classroom experiences where she was asked by one child to be a patient in the doctor’s corner. She joined in the play and modelled appropriate social play until one child said, “okay, you can go now. We have the next patient,” and then Adrienne moved out of the play sequence. In this moment, she believes that she was able to read the cues from the children, and step back, giving them the space to lead the play scenario further.

Observer. Adrienne believes that another important role of the educator is to develop the necessary skills to observe the children's play. She believes that by observing the children's play, this helps contribute to her ability to help extend the play further. Adrienne believes that observation is a vital part of an educator's everyday activities. It is through her observations that she can "understand the needs of each child, and help support their overall development." Adrienne believes that by carefully observing the children she is able to decipher where each child is at developmentally, and then plan for activities to support this development. As we watched a particular excerpt, Adrienne draws my attention to what she calls an example of her beliefs in the importance of observing. She explained that boy J was busy playing construction worker. J then proceeded to approach Adrienne and asked her for some paper on which to draw. Adrienne responded, "well alright then, I got you some paper." J proceeded by asking Adrienne to make a drain from his name on the piece of paper, so she then used this opportunity to extend his play by asking, "what does a drain look like?" Adrienne explained that this was a great example of how she uses her role as an educator to observe and then help extend this child's play. Instead of drawing the picture for this child, she tried to extend his knowledge and develop his sense of self by keeping him actively involved in the process. Adrienne believes that by observing this child on a daily basis, she has become more in tune with his capabilities and as a result, was able to help extend his play.

Scaffolding. Adrienne believes that an educator's third role in the play is the ability to scaffold and help guide the children's play. She explained, "I have always seen that play is fine, but what play needs is extra things added to it—abilities to extend the activity in some way; that I see more as the role of the educator." She believes by scaffolding and guiding the play, the educator can assist the child in developing his/her skills in various areas. As Adrienne explained this belief further, "I might play to help perhaps extend the thinking, and

in asking the questions or giving them questions that would extend the thinking, and extend the ideas and create more possibilities.” Adrienne mentioned briefly a connection between her ECE courses and her classroom practice here. She talked about learning about Vygotsky and how she believes that as an educator she can scaffold the play and help the children reach that next level in their knowledge and understanding. However, she also explained that another child in the room could also serve as the more knowledgeable peer, in some cases, to promote scaffolding. A fuller discussion of the role of professional development follows in a later section.

Planning. Adrienne believes that a fourth element in an educator’s role in play is “planning.” Adrienne believes that planning is based on the above mentioned skills of modelling, observing the children’s interests, and scaffolding. By observing the children at play, Adrienne believes that she is able to make more informed decisions related to her planning. Adrienne repeated on several occasions that she firmly believes that in order for learning to occur through play, one cannot expect the answers to magically appear from a text book. In her words: “I tend to think that it is their play that leads the curriculum at best. Planning was based on what we saw them doing, playing, showing an interest in exploring, playing with.” She continued to explain her beliefs that the educator needs to be able to notice what the children are doing, what they are responding to in the environment, and figure out ways to extend that knowledge in the classroom. Adrienne illuminated this point: “I need to be paying attention to what children are doing, what their interests are and not necessarily having preconceived themes or notions of what they need to learn this period.”

Adrienne made a link between her own beliefs about her role in the play and the type of planning she does. She believes that she is more of an emergent planner. She believes it is her role to plan based on her observations of the children’s needs and interests. For example, she explained in detail here:

So I can't say that I plan for the week. Because if no one's interested in the plan [activity she had originally set out], and then somebody says water play [she will go with the child's interests]. And if I've planned water play then for the next day I won't [she will not do water play the next day, she will do water play the day the children asked for it]; I'm going to think of something else. So, it's just kind of a mental thing. I try and make sure everyday, I cover the various areas and then within the week that I've touched on them.

As a result, Adrienne believes that her observations of the children's interests help her to choose the direction of her activities and consequently her planning emerges based on these interests. She does not stick to one plan or idea, and is flexible in changing her activities to ensure they meet the children's needs.

Educator's Beliefs About the Role of the Environment in Play

Another significant category that emerged from my in-depth interviews and classroom observations with Adrienne was her beliefs about the relevance of the classroom play environment. Her definition of the environment encompasses the set-up of learning areas in the classroom, materials, toys, as well as physical aspects, such as windows, colors, and pictures on the walls. She believes that in order to understand and support play in the classroom, the educator needs to create an environment that is conducive to play. She believes that the most important consideration is that the environment be child-centered, so as to match each child's needs.

Adrienne believes that "a rich environment is one that reflects different things going on in the classroom. Things can stay out and be gone back to. Like what's on the wall may well reflect one child's work but I don't think it should be uniform." She believes that the environment needs to reflect the interests of the children, because they should be stimulated daily. Adrienne believes that a rich play-based environment is one that is not static; it is one

that adapts and changes depending on the children's particular needs and interests. Adrienne described: "there are some things that come in and some things that will go out; you know you might have a cooking centre, you may have a fire station in the room." Therefore, she believes that the materials in the classroom must be carefully selected based on the children's needs, levels and abilities (i.e., developmentally appropriate).

Materials. Adrienne believes that an important part of the play learning environment are the materials. Adrienne believes that it is important to have certain materials in her classroom to optimize play. The materials in her classroom include: toys, educational games, art supplies, dress-up clothes, blocks, Lego, water and sand play, and manipulatives among others. Adrienne explained that she has the more traditional materials in her classroom such as markers, crayons, Lego, crafts, puzzles, books, play dough, clay, and paint. She also believes that the materials need to be set out in appropriate ways in order to allow the children to use them freely, as well as having clearly distinguished learning areas. She discussed this here:

...in our class there are clearly defined areas: there's the block corner, there's the dramatic play corner, etc., but you can bring the blocks into the dramatic play corner if you need them, and the reading, or the quiet corner... whatever you want to call it. If you want to do a puzzle in there, that's fine. You know, not to say that it is super permissive and you can do whatever you want—you as a four year old, you have to have a reason. If you just want to start throwing blocks in there, I'm going to ask you why? ...And if you can't give me a good answer, I'm gonna suggest that you either find something to do with them or your gonna have to put them back, because there are other people.

Adrienne follows two criteria in choosing play materials for her group:

...one, is prompted by what someone has asked for. In general, if they ask for something, they can have it. And, I, also I, everyday, I think of what we did the day before. And then, I want to do something different. Like, I want to make sure that I have something that's a little more, not gross motor, but like the big blocks. Or the big, the things that you can grab with your whole hand. And then, something that's fine motor—a cutting, drawing with pencils, something smaller. And then something that's tactile; shaving cream, plasticine, play dough. And whatever it is, something that's extremely tactile; water play or something.

Adrienne believes that the environment needs to support the children's learning in different ways, and must not be static. She firmly believes in rotating the play materials, so that the children are not always playing with the same things day in and day out. Adrienne adds “the materials also needed to be rotated on a regular basis and not always used in a traditional form.” Further, she believes that allowing the children to use materials “in out of the ordinary ways encourages divergent thinking.”

Adrienne believes in involving the parents in bringing different materials into the classroom. She suggests that one way to encourage the children to use materials in different ways is to take materials from home and adapt them into the classroom. She explains here:

I tell all the parents, “I say you bring me all your junk you think is garbage, we will find something to do with it.” Like anything Styrofoam, when we do our construction corner, the you know little plastic saws, they'll cut through Styrofoam right? And the kids don't just have to pretend that they are cutting a table; they can actually saw something into two pieces. Or like a huge box, like if we open it up they can saw that too. They can punch holes with the uh, screwdrivers and stuff; so to bring in junk and garbage and let them explore that. A carpet tube turned into a canoe once. You know,

like it's giving them as much as we can get. But we introduce new things and see where they go with it.

Adrienne believes that the play materials in her classroom serve as tools to expand and develop the children's current knowledge base. Stimulating the children's creativity is a priority according to Adrienne and this is why she argues that "educators should not place restrictions on children when they are exploring." Thus, in her classroom she believes it is important to foster a safe haven for the children, where they can explore and play at their own pace. This includes the children's rotation and choice of materials to play with in different areas of the classroom, a point addressed below. She explains her belief in following the children's leads and interests in the classroom environment:

Make a mess, don't make a mess. Wear a smock or don't wear a smock. I don't care because, like sometimes smocks are uncomfortable and it can impede a child's ability to accomplish their own task. If they are uncomfortable 'you don't want to wear shoes fine. If you need to be on the carpet with your feet touching the carpet, as opposed to being with your shoes.'

Adrienne believes that when educators are constantly hounding the children as they play to put the puzzle back before they go to the paint corner, or put on a smock before painting, adults can stifle their creativity. She feels that sometimes children are in such a deep discovery mode, that they need to just go with the moment, and focus their energy and attention on interacting with others or on learning from their play.

In sum, Adrienne believes that her role in play and in the classroom environment is to make informed decisions based on the children's expressed and observed interests and also she believes in providing the children with a range of developmentally appropriate materials and activities. She believes that it is important to touch on all areas of development daily

when planning and preparing the classroom, and that the rotating of materials is a critical part of this.

Choice. As an educator, Adrienne believes that besides offering a variety of materials for children during play, she must also encourage the children to follow their instincts and express their emotions through play by giving them choices. A sub-category within the role of the environment section is “choice.” Adrienne believes that in play the children should actively make their own choices: specifically, with what materials they would like to play, how they would like to play with the materials, and with whom they would like to play. She believes that it is important to give the children lots of choice and options, “they don’t have to, you know, if they start out there they don’t have to stay there. It’s really free-play.”

She really believes in fostering explorative play and she feels that the best way to do this is to allow the children to follow their curiosities as they engage in free play (See Table I for link to daily schedule). Adrienne said that she knows certain educators who will force the children to stay at an activity, because that is what they chose and “if that’s the activity you chose, you have to stay there, for at least ten minutes,” however she believes that this does not support the children in their play. Adrienne adds, “this is not what play is about.” Rather she believes in encouraging the children to problem-solve, as much as possible, and this is why she does not place limits on the number of children per center. She explains how she fosters this belief in the classroom:

After nap, what we do is we separate the tables. Like a subliminal hint that it is only for, let’s say for three, or four kids. But, if six kids want to squish around the table, ‘Who am I to stop them? You know?’ And if, it’s then ‘oh it’s not enough’—‘well we can solve this problem together.’ And ‘oh he’s pushing me’ or whatever. ‘Okay well that’s a conflict that needs to be resolved.’ And that’s something they have to go through. So, why deprive them of that, by saying: ‘oh you can only sit there if your

bum is in a chair? You know there are three chairs, there are three kids.' And then the flip side of that, just because you limit them in such a fashion, doesn't mean they're not going to have conflict anyways.

Adrienne believes that sometimes she may need to intervene, but she would like the children to be able to work through their problems together, to learn that sense of community and belonging. Further, Adrienne believes that part of giving children choices is to ensure that their voices are heard in the classroom:

you know, because if you just hang the art up, some of them don't even notice. Like it's funny sometimes, some of them are like, 'Oh look what I made' three weeks later you know. So, I find if they have a say in where it's gonna go, they're much more likely to say, 'Mommy, mommy come look at what I made,' and that stimulates even more conversation.

Adrienne believes that by providing choices this will ensure that the play is child-directed and personally satisfying. Adrienne draws on an excerpt mentioned earlier from the videotaped classroom activities, where a child was busy building an ice rink under the table to link to her beliefs about offering choices in play. She explained, "I don't know what his thought process was but maybe he thought, it needed to be indoors. Because a hockey rink is indoors generally. Or maybe he wants to be alone." For whatever reason, this child decided to take his play under the table and clearly he was in charge of making a choice about his play.

Beliefs about Play and Professional Development

Adrienne and I spent a great deal of time discussing her training in early childhood. She repeated several times that she did not believe that her program in Continuing Education in ECE altered or changed her beliefs about play in any way. What she did believe was that, "it enhanced it, I learned new things. Like you know new ways, new games to present to the

kids. Or new ideas on how to play; not how to play with them, but just different things to do you know.” Four sub-categories emanated from our discussions: beliefs about important play proponents, beliefs about stages of play, community of learners, play courses.

Important play proponents. Adrienne believes that her training introduced her to many different play proponents. She mentioned Maria Montessori, and said “we all have Montessori toys in our classroom whether we know it or not, okay. Like the self correcting stacking toys.” She believes in incorporating different Montessori methods into her own classroom such as materials, toys, props, and so on that do not need to be used in one intended way. Instead, she believes adults and children need to be creative: “All that stuff does not need to be used in the fashion that it was set out to be used; that’s my philosophy. That you know just because something is supposed to go ABC doesn’t mean it can’t go BCA.”

She also recalled learning about an important Italian man, known as Louis Malaguzzi, who developed the Reggio Emilia approach to education. She recalled learning about the “importance of the family, and the community in the learning environment,” as well as the importance of nature and bringing nature indoors. She discussed a link here between her own beliefs about play and Malaguzzi (as she also designs her curriculum around outdoor play. She tries to emulate parts of the Reggio approach by incorporating lots of natural light and encouraging the parents to be involved in the classroom.

Adrienne also discussed a link between her own beliefs and her training. She referred to a particular educator to whom she was exposed during her training, but whose name now escapes her:

And what’s that woman’s name? We all had to see the movie nine million times, of her classroom with the kids climbing over everything; that was really cool. And it did, I just thought it was interesting to see, because it was from the seventies. So, it was

nice to see that someone was trying to do it twenty years ago. But uh, what she was doing wasn't any different from what I was doing.

Here, she was referring to Bev Bos, who is highly cited in the ECE field as being an eclectic educator with a predominant focus and philosophy that children learn through play. Adrienne was able to connect her beliefs and thought systems here with part of her training. She made the connection in this way: "I think the most important thing is that it affirmed what I believed. That I would hear these people saying you know, that they do learn, there is proof that kids learn through play." This seemed to be a very powerful reassurance for Adrienne, as this part of her training helped reaffirm her beliefs and convictions. "It made me feel that I was doing a good job, because I was doing the right thing." In this excerpt, Adrienne shared how her training seemed to help her reflect on current theory and how she translated this into her own practice. She believes that her training affirmed her previous beliefs and values about the importance of play, helping to reinforce her beliefs so that she could put them into practice in her own classroom.

Stages of play. A second sub-category under professional training was beliefs about developmental 'stages of play.' In terms of developmental stages of play, Adrienne was very honest with me and explained that she did learn all about the different stages and types of play in school, but she did not remember the names or specific details. She believes that what she learned in her classes, assignments, and group projects helped her to consolidate her understanding of play in the classroom. She believes that she was able to make that connection between play theory, course content, and her own classroom practices. She affirmed this belief here:

We learned all those different stages that the kids go through. And those, uh, I mean they make sense, that the eighteen months to two years old are doing their little parallel play and then as they get older and they get into my class their into the

cooperative play more and more. And when you see them deviating from what is considered to be the norm, it stands out. It's like 'ooh that child is not using their imaginative play skills or whatever' you know you can slap a label on it pretty easily.

In this excerpt, she was referring to Piaget's stages of play and how as the child reaches a certain age he/she is capable of more developed forms of social and cognitive play. As the child becomes more cognitively competent, he/she is also able to play alongside and with their peers more easily. Adrienne believes that her training reinforced her understanding of play and the many elements involved in a child's development. She believes that her training helped her become aware of the developmental stages of play, and then reflect on how she could apply them in her own classroom.

Beliefs about the importance of sharing play practices in training. A third sub-category related to training that emerged from Adrienne's case was that of 'the sharing of play practices.' Adrienne believes that most of her "aha" moments during her training, really came from her group discussions of play practices with other educators in the classroom: "yeah, that came not so much from what the teacher was telling us, but from just group discussion. And 'oh I did this in my room.' Because I usually, it stems from 'I have a child who has trouble entering play situations.'" Adrienne believes that these moments in her program were the most revealing and significant for her, as they gave her time to connect with her peers and to discuss their own classroom experiences. She called these "brainstorming practice" sessions: "so it was just more of a brainstorming session." She continued to explain that she believes that these moments were really beneficial in her career and development as an educator: "...yeah, that was affirming because like 'oh yeah I do that too.' Or for me to offer what I do in my class and having someone else there, say 'I'm gonna try that.' And then they come back a few weeks later and say 'you know what, that really worked.'" Adrienne believed that these moments were very revealing and helped her to

reflect on her current practice. In turn, she believed that these moments in her training helped her consolidate her own understanding of play and connect both the theory she was learning in the training program to her own practices in her daycare classroom.

Play-oriented courses. A fourth, and final sub-category under training was 'beliefs about play oriented courses.' Adrienne's Attestation program did not have a particular course on 'Play'; however each class touched on play in some form. For example, she talked about three activities courses that she took, specifically "Educational Activities for 0-3 (infant/toddlers), 3-5 (pre-schoolers) and 6-12 (school age)." According to Adrienne, she believed that in these three courses, the students learned about the benefits of play, how to extend children's learning, and how to adapt activities based on the children's needs. She believes that these activities courses helped her understand how to focus on each child's developmental needs, and how to plan age-appropriate activities, She described how her assignments helped her draw attention to the play in her curriculum:

I forget exactly, ten or twelve different activity plans, based around obviously, playing. Hum, that hit the different cognitive development, fine motor, whatever. You had to defend why, what your activity was going to accomplish and why. Right, you couldn't just say 'today we're, you know, whatever, playing with wet sand.' Like, you had to say something, like 'In my class, they are learning to hold their pencil. They need to work on their fine motor grip, whatever. And this is how they are going to do it.'

Adrienne believes that by planning and presenting her activities to her classmates, this helped her understand the different stages of play and children's developmental stages. Not only did the students need to plan activities specifically for their age group and the developmental needs of the children, but also they were expected to adapt the activity based on the needs of the child. She explained in more detail:

Let's say it was three to five year olds. You had to pick, are they three years old, are they four years old, or are they five years old. It was quite specific and you had to provide adaptations, because obviously not everyone in your class can do exactly the same thing, at the same time. So, but if it is open enough, it can incorporate almost anyone. And obviously, if you're stringing beads, that's not appropriate for an eighteen month old; but from three to five, unless you have a special needs child, who puts things in his/her mouth, there's no reason any of them can't do that. And you would accomplish many of the same goals. So, in that respect, the classes were quite helpful. You had to come up with your different activities.

Adrienne believed that this type of learning atmosphere and these types of activities were very informative. Although she did not attend a special course on play, she believes that her courses did enable her to learn specifically about the important theories regarding cognitive development, stages of play, as well as age-appropriate activities that could be planned and integrated directly into her own classroom. Adrienne believes that these courses played an important role in her ability to plan activities that could stimulate the needs of each child in her classroom. She believed that her courses helped her make a connection between the theoretical aspects significant to play, and how to apply these theories in practice. The fact that she was able to directly apply what she was being taught was an important element of her training she believes. She attempts to carry these beliefs forward now when she hosts student educators from an ECE program in her classroom, she tries to replicate some of what she learned in her program. For instance, she tries to challenge their planning ideas by asking them to think of ways to adapt or alter their activities to meet the children's varied needs while displaying creativity, something she learned in her training. She gave an example of how she does this: "When I have students in my class I say 'when you bring me an activity I want you to tweak it. I want you to do one thing differently from all the millions of times you

have seen other people do the activity. Like I don't care how small it is it could be using square beads instead of round beads; but I want one thing to be different just to get your juices flowing.'" Apparently, Adrienne's program got her 'juices flowing' so to speak, in that it encouraged her to push student educators to become more reflective practitioners. Clearly, she felt it provided a model for her to use in supervising these student educators and consolidating her own play beliefs.

Potential Challenges to Play Beliefs

One important category that emerged throughout our discussions was the challenge of implementing play from the parents of the children in the ECE classroom. Adrienne believes that some parents want to see their children succeed by using more didactic teaching methods. Adrienne explains this belief here: "I have a lot of kids who attend a private preschool in the morning where everyone must participate in this activity at the same time right now. Stop what you are doing, clean up. So the kids are really getting both extremes." Adrienne believes that many parents like the structure of the private preschool system because it is academic in focus. However, as the year goes on the parents start to complain about the preschool, because it is too teacher directed.

Adrienne believes that parents often choose this type of preschool for prestigious reasons: "these parents have these crazy ideas of how their kids are going to be prepared for school; and it aggravates me to no end that they send them there." Adrienne believes that these parents are sending mixed messages to their children. On the one hand, the children are picking up with Adrienne how to learn through play and exploration; on the other, they learn to perform academically in the highly structured preschool program. She fears for these children, as they are being "...pressured into becoming miniature adults, instead of enjoying their childhood." Adrienne expressed a concern that the children do not have enough time to be children, and she wants to ensure that the children in her classroom are not deterred from

learning through play. To this end, she continues to reinforce the value of play to the parents in her daycare, hoping that eventually they will also see the benefits.

Chapter VI: “You can have a teacher sitting down and talking about the alphabet, but only through play they will learn” (Ellen, 2006)

In the following section I will introduce Ellen’s background information and then proceed with her play beliefs and experiences.

Ellen

Ellen is a 30-year-old, Caucasian, female educator, who works in a CPE in a the downtown core of a greater metropolitan region. Ellen is a Canadian-born Greek woman who grew up in Canada, but spent many summers and vacations in Greece. Her mother tongue is English; however, she speaks fluent Greek and French. She has worked in the daycare environment for eight years and with children between the ages of eighteen months and five years of age. She graduated from a 3-year Diplome D’Etudes Collégiales (DEC) program in ECE eight years ago. During her 3-year training program Ellen worked in the summers at another well-known CPE with infants. Upon completion of her degree, Ellen was fortunate to obtain a position in a corporate daycare where she has spent the last eight years working with the toddlers, threes and fours. Currently her classroom contains a group of eight 3-year-olds.

In my discussions with Ellen several important categories emerged: (a) Play beliefs impacted by memories of play; (b) educator’s beliefs about play (sub categories of discovery and learning); (c) Beliefs about the educator’s role in play; (d) Beliefs about the role of the environment in play (curriculum); and (e) Impact of training on beliefs.

Play Beliefs Impacted by Memories of Play

One topic that emerged through our discussions was the impact of childhood memories on play. Ellen attributes her play beliefs to her experiences growing up in a large community oriented environment, where all the neighbours knew each other and the children were always convening outside to play. She was able to recall more play episodes as she

became older, such as engaging in pretend play and role play with her peers as a school-aged child. She talked vividly about her memories when she would pretend to be a teacher giving out stickers and writing on the chalkboard. The pretend play also extended beyond the teacher role into the kitchen where she dramatized life as a parent and caregiver imitating her mother and grandmother, saying “The little bag on the shoulder, a lot of pots and pans.” She also remembered playing with many home-made or household materials as opposed to more commercial toys. It seemed that whatever was in the house, whether it was a pot or pan, old shoes, dress up clothes, she would find a use for it. These memories for Ellen played an important role in defining her beliefs about play.

Adolescence and adulthood. Ellen believes that as one gets older the types of play children engage in shift, as do their interests. As the years passed, the types of play Ellen engaged in shifted towards an adolescent focus. She explained that she used to babysit frequently for the children in her neighbourhood. Her own experiences playing as a child in her home, outdoors, with siblings were later transferred into the activities she did with the children she babysat. She recollects here “we used to do a lot of peek-a-boo games. A lot of what my parents had taught me I was playing with those kids. Like games and hum, the pots and pans and cooking activities with herbs inside.” She believes that her beliefs and actions were impacted by her own memories and hands-on learning as a child. She explains that these early experiences (childhood games), were later incorporated into what she would do with the children she babysat. Such as playing dramatically, pretending to be a mom or dad or a cook or engaging in hide and seek. As an adult, Ellen confessed that she still plays, but now with the children around her such as her 10-year-old godchild. She still embarks upon very similar imaginative games, for example “we get engaged in different kinds of play with school-role playing and following her lead.” Today when she plays, she follows the lead of

the children; however, she believes that there is a similar pattern in the type of play with dolls, school, and house that brings her back to her own childhood memories of play.

Overall, Ellen believes that her childhood memories of play were positive impacting her current play beliefs as an educator. She believes that her positive play memories have had an impact on the activities she herself incorporates in her own classroom. For example, she has a large dramatic play area with lots of real life material for the children to explore with (i.e., real pots and pans, plastic cups, spice jars, empty jam jars). Since dramatic play was such a big part of her own childhood experiences this is something she brings into her own classroom today.

Beliefs About Play

Multiple definitions. Ellen believes that play is a power-laden word that cannot be described easily. Ellen believes that play can be interpreted in many different ways making it difficult to define. No two people will explain or define play in exactly the same way. Play holds such an important place in young children's lives that Ellen believes without it children would not be able to grow and develop into curious and thoughtful beings.

Ellen believes that there is not one "right" way to define or explain play. She has developed her own understanding of play over the course of her life time and believes that she is still learning about play as an adult. Ellen believes as she plays with her godchildren, and with the children in her class, she learned more about the role of play and how to incorporate it into the classroom on a daily basis.

Multiple purposes. Ellen believes that play serves multiple purposes: it enables her to learn about the children's likes and dislikes and current abilities, materials they use in the classroom, the types of social play in which the children engage. Ellen believes play is:

...a big opportunity for the children to learn on their own. And that is when I find we get to observe a lot as an educator where they are at, their abilities to challenge them.

To see what they know, a bit of their background. I just find that I learn a lot from the children, about the children through their play. How they interact with one another, how they distribute stuff in the classroom and with who they interact.

Discovery. Ellen clearly believes that “one of the purposes of play is to allow for discovery.” She believes that children “discover how to play in different ways as they use different materials during solitary, parallel, or group play.” As children play they have the opportunity to test out hunches and discover how the world and the materials within that world function. She makes a link between her belief that play leads to discovery and a child in one of the classroom videotaped excerpts. H was busy playing in the dramatic area wearing an apron and he slid an oven mitt over his left hand. He glanced over his right shoulder and called towards one of his peers “come, supper is ready.” He then pulled open the oven door using both hands and gently pulled out a tray with a green bowl in the center. He balanced the tray carefully so as not to drop the bowl on the floor. He placed the tray on the top of the counter and then told the child to sit down. The peer approached the tray and grabbed the bowl with two hands. H’s eyes became very tiny and he said in a deep voice, “I told you not to touch the oven. You will burn your hands.”

Ellen believes that the above noted excerpt shows her belief in the discovery process as H explored the concepts of temperature and the fact that if you touch a hot tray you can get burned. She believes that H was also discovering the process of re-enacting parental roles as he took on the tasks involved in preparing supper. The fact that he placed an oven mitt on his hand showed that he was re-enacting, perhaps something he has seen at home. At the same time, he was also making sense of his own world and lived experiences.

Learning. Ellen believes that another function of play is the learning associated with this behaviour. She believes play is the “prime vehicle through which children develop knowledge about themselves, others, and the world around them”. She believes that children

learn through play, hence it needs to be a big part of the day. Ellen believes that through play children develop all areas of their entire being: social, emotional, language, cognitive, autonomy, and aesthetic. She believes that through play children acquire new skills daily:

...a lot of language goes into it I find too. Thinking of my kids right now the language, the sharing, the waiting, taking turns, hum there are lots of things. The problem solving on their own, they are using the 5-minute rule after five minutes then it is my turn. Or 'I don't like it when you take the plate from me.' A lot of feelings go into it now, they say if they clean up well we always say 'good job you cleaned up.' So overall, it touches all the areas of development because when they are sitting and playing with fruits and vegetables it's cognition too. They are classifying things when I see them put all the fruits on one plate and all the vegetables on another side.

Ellen draws on an example from the videotaped classroom processes to illustrate her belief that learning occurs through play. The excerpt shows a group of children who were sitting at the manipulative table matching, classifying, and sorting coloured puppies by colours, shapes, and sizes. She explained that this is a perfect example of how children learn through their play: cognitive skills as they problem solve, language skills as they talk about the different colours and attributes of the bears, social and emotional skills as they share the task with peers, and developing their own sense of self as they explore. She continued to reinforce the belief that learning takes place in the classroom here:

I find I am seeing a lot of social skills. They are learning to share with the other friends, to help them, taking turns. And they are starting to communicate with one another which I find important for the 3-year-olds to start exchanging conversation. And again they learn how to play on their own, like there is not one way to play with it. I like to put toys out that you can play with more than one way, more open-ended.

As we watched the video tape, Ellen draws our attention to another example of her belief that learning occurs through play in the classroom. In this excerpt the children were busy filling their measuring cups with soapy water and then pouring them back into the water tub. M lifted up his sponge with his right hand and commented about the bubbles that were falling back into the water. His eyes opened like large saucers as Ellen poured a few drops of red food colouring into the already soapy water. M gasped and exclaimed “wow, Ellen the water is red, red bubbles all over.” Ellen used this example to support her belief that learning occurs through play:

...we see them learning about sense of touch and learning about the sense of feeling.

Pouring from one container to another, hum and they have soap which is science.

And they are learning about what happens if you add so and so to the water. And they are adding food colouring now and they can see each other playing as well in different activities. So you see they are free to choose the things they like to choose.

They learn to clean up after themselves and to make other choices.

Life experiences. Another aspect that Ellen believes is important in play is the relevance of personal life experiences. She explains that children:

...take in real life experiences into their play. And they too have more imagination and more creativity as they're making pictures of all kinds of things now. And they are taking them {referring to the babies} even to the sand table to show the baby the sand and they go back. And they take their babies to colour with them and they put them on their lap.

The baby theme was very popular in Ellen's room at the time of the interview and she believes that it is important to follow the children's interests and to expand on them. She believes that by talking to them about real life experiences and encouraging them to reflect

on things such as clothing that babies need to wear in the winter, or feeding, and nap times is an important part of the play. She explains this belief:

Well, we talked about winter clothes, so I don't know if because of that concept that they are playing it now. Getting them covers, maybe when we talked about winter clothes I said 'it's getting colder so we have to put on our jackets and we have to get our blankets.' So maybe that has something to do with it they put their blanket, they put their little mat on the babies and sometimes they put the babies for naps on their chairs. It is really life experiences that I find they are really grasping.

Ellen pointed out another example of her belief in the importance of tying in life experiences in the play. She drew on an excerpt from the videotaped classroom processes where A approached Ellen with a baby snuggled up against her shoulder and told Ellen that her baby was sleeping. Ellen said to her, "I see your baby is sleeping why don't we put her on her back? It is safer and easier to breathe." A looked at her baby and then walked over to the crib and gently placed the baby on her back, covered her with the yellow lace blanket, and rubbed her forehead. Ellen expressed that this was a perfect example supporting her belief in the importance of tying in lived experiences into the play. She believes that talking about and learning about life lessons is how children are able to accommodate new information and to adapt their own pre-existing thoughts and beliefs. Prior to this conversation, A would have put the baby on her belly to sleep, but now that Ellen has explained that it is easier for the baby to breathe on her back, A seemed to understand this concept and changed her behaviour. Ellen summed up her beliefs here:

...well just to come back to the best part that learning really takes place through play. And the children are learning to incorporate their likes into it. Like I said, you know, you try to choose things that they are interested in. Like if you get the markers out and if it is too challenging for them or if they don't like it. Or if there is no interest, it

is a power struggle to try and get them to stay focused. And if you force them they are not learning.

As we watched the video excerpts Ellen drew my attention to several more examples that she felt supported her belief that learning occurs through play. In one excerpt we observed the children busily engaged in play at the sand table: one child filled his funnel with sand using his right hand to scoop up the sand and his left to hold the funnel. He repeated this action several times before putting the funnel down and picking up a red bucket. As he picked up the red bucket and filled it with sand he said, "oh look it's full, oh now it's empty" as he emptied the contents. He then picked up a cone-like piece and pretended to make an ice cream ball, which he placed on top of the cone by patting it firmly. Ellen believes that this particular play episode shows the various learning skills that this child was exhibiting such as:

...it's again a lot of measurement, more mathematical logic happening there.

Deciding how to pour, how to empty, when it's full when it's empty and they have shared using those words as well. And the creativity, even though they had a little cone they made an ice cream cone.

In sum, Ellen believes that play affords children opportunities to discover, learn new concepts, and explore using their own personal life experiences.

Beliefs About the Educator's Role in Play

Another significant category that emerged from the interviews, observations, and the IPR process with Ellen is beliefs about the role of the educator in play. As an educator, Ellen believes that she has an important role in the children's play. In her ECE training Ellen learned that she must know when to enter the play and when to step back, but she has also learned this by watching the children in her care and understanding their cues. Often the children ask Ellen to play with them, especially in the morning when only

a few children have arrived or at the end of the day when the number of children in the class is reduced. Ellen explained "if they want to play with me for instance, I am going to take a baby and play with them and then say 'okay well mommy has to go cook now.'"

Sensitive observer. Ellen believes that one of her roles in the child's play is knowing when to help extend the play and when to step back. Apparently this is a skill that has taken quite a bit of time and patience to develop, but she believes it is imperative to read the children's cues and follow their lead. Ellen provided an example here to support this belief:

I feel my role is like more of a sensitive observer. Like, I like to observe the children. And if I see them getting a bit stressed I try to intervene so there isn't a struggle because they get a little bit too nervous. Like they try to get my attention, so I try and go and put one hand on their back and say 'what's the problem, what's the problem?' And I let them talk about it and encourage them to say 'I want this toy what can we do? Who can take it first? Are you okay with it?' But then I let them go. And sometimes I get engaged too and say 'let's make a fruit salad,' and then they bring me all the fruit.

She believes that sometimes as the children play she needs to scaffold them to help them reach that next level, or as Vygotsky (1978) termed it, "their zone of proximal development." As an educator Ellen believes her role is to read those cues and respond promptly to them with care and consideration. She feels that she must be sensitive to the children's needs and feelings in play, because she does not want to hurt their egos or stifle their creativity. She draws on several examples of this belief from the videotaped classroom processes where she did step into the play to help give some direction, much as she described above, for example, she suggested making a fruit salad or that the children bathe their babies and then dress them. Nevertheless, Ellen believes that it is

important to really know each child in order to understand what messages he/she is sending and how the educator can help extend their play.

Scaffolding. Ellen believes that another one of her roles in the children's play is to scaffold. Part of the scaffolding process requires Ellen to be aware of the children's cues and to know when to enter and when to step out of the play. Ellen believes in the art of "stepping back" in the play. She feels this is something that is crucial in the development of the play scenario. Some children are very clingy and often seek adults as their play partners, so she encourages them to learn to play on their own and with their peers instead of constantly searching for adult approval. She describes here:

...especially when I see them going I step back a little bit, because certain children they learn to play only with an adult. From what the parents have told me that they are very clingy and they always need the parents to be there. So I try to step back and let them play and if I see them getting discouraged I try to encourage the play more. I will intervene in the play and then step back again.

Ellen draws on an excerpt from the videotaped classroom processes to illustrate her belief. She describes that one child constantly wanted her presence in the play scenario. Instead of saying no or always joining the play, Ellen tried to redirect and scaffold the child. She clarifies: "they learn to go and play and if they want to play then I will say 'hey look at Alexa feeding her baby-you should ask her what she is feeding her baby?' And she will go and ask her and so then it avoids 'the Ellen come with me.'"

Ellen believes that it is important to promote different types of play in her classroom, especially if she sees the children may be struggling with cooperation or parallel play. She referred to one example that we observed on the videotaped classroom processes where one child who was new to the daycare would always engage in solitary play. However, after a month, Ellen decided that he might be ready for more parallel and

even cooperative play, so she set up the manipulative table to encourage this higher level of play. As we watched the classroom processes, we saw two boys sitting next to one another each with their own pegboard, but only one bowl of pegs. In this scenario, the one little boy who was once very shy and reserved was now chatting with his peer as they shared the different colored pegs. This was an example of Ellen's scaffolding to extend the learning by setting up the play environment with appropriate materials. Ellen explained that she did not force the children to sit at this table, but she knew that this boy enjoyed the pegboard, so she tried to extend his learning by setting up the environment in this way.

Flexibility. Another important role of the educator in play is flexibility. Ellen believes in "embracing the moment and in being flexible in the classroom and outdoors." She explained that sometimes she may plan on reading a story, but perhaps the children are really interested in something else or need to move their bodies and exert their excess energy. She believes that "a skilled educator needs to be flexible enough during play to go with these moments and not worry about whether or not the story was read at 10:15 or the next day" (See Table 2 for daily schedule). Ellen drew my attention to her belief about flexibility in the play in the videotaped classroom processes. In this excerpt, Ellen approaches the circle clutching her red felt story bag. As she sat down to start the story, the children noticed that the Velcro had come unfastened and they brought this to her attention. Ellen took this moment to explain to the children that she had extra Velcro pieces in her bag and that they could fix the piece together. She pulled out the Velcro and handed it to the children. They each touched the surface and commented on the textures: hard, soft and 'picky'. The children then touched the felt board and they were able to see how the Velcro actually sticks to the felt board. Ellen commented, "this was a whole extra ten minutes of circle time. They were so into the Velcro, it's not a useless moment.

It was really productive,” Reinforcing her belief in the importance of the educator being flexible in play.

Reflective praise. Ellen believes that part of her role as educator is providing the children with reflective praise during their play. She believes that it is important to move around the classroom and show interest in what the children are playing and how they are playing. She believes that it is important to pass by and to make a reflective rather than a blanket statement about the children's play such as, “oh, I see you put all the same colors together.” She believes this type of comment acknowledges what the children are doing:

I find it's important like, even if they are playing I go by and touch their shoulder to tell them that I am still there. And I find that is very important instead of staying on top of their heads and saying ‘oh you are playing in the sand,’ ‘you are blowing.’ I find that overwhelming when the educators do that too much. So I say a few words you know and then step back. If I see them losing it or having a hard time then I will go in to intervene. Not right away, I try to see what they will do in the beginning.

Space. Ellen believes that part of her role is also giving the children adequate space to explore and to deal with situations on their own instead of constantly hovering over them. She continued to explain:

...yes, because I feel it is important for you to be there because you can always help them increase the information and to have more of an interaction. And I find some children need to know that, they like it when you are there close by. But what I find also is that they really like to be independent on their own. And I find that with some of them if you go too near often they will stop their play, they need space. I have noticed this with a few children, so with them I try to stand back even more and intervene less. Because some like H she gets really

intimidated if you go next to her. But if you aren't next to her you can hear her talking in conversation and interacting.

In sum, Ellen believes her role in play: is that of a sensitive observer, scaffolder, offering flexibility and giving the children space. We will now look at Ellen's beliefs about the role of the environment in play.

Beliefs About Play and the Role of the Environment

Ellen believes that the environment plays a large role in determining how and what the children play. She also believes that the daily schedule and the curriculum are important in determining what opportunities the children will have to play and learn.

Daily schedule and curriculum. Ellen believes an important aspect in the role of the environment is having a consistent and predictable schedule and a balanced curriculum (see Table 2 for daily schedule). She describes her daily classroom practices:

So in the morning it is more teacher-directed. That is like usually when I focus on a skill or to learn a concept that I work with the children; so I will use play with them.

And like with the pumpkins for instance, when we were playing with the pumpkins and the concept of small, big, round, tall. Again, I use that too.

Ellen believes it is important to observe the children in their play in order to determine their developmental level and then plan the daily schedule of activities. She believes in building her curriculum and her activities based on the children's different learning styles and needs. She believes in opening all areas in the classroom for the children to explore; however, sometimes she will close an area so that the children can focus more on a particular skill. She explained her reason for doing this: "but sometimes I close certain areas, so they focus more on certain areas that I am trying to teach a concept in. Because if it is always cars, I will say 'okay the cars are closed right now so we are going to focus on so and so.' Ellen believes

that when the play becomes stagnant or that the children are bored, the environment must be set up in order to stimulate different types of play.

Ellen believes that her curriculum is based around play, but she clarifies:

I wouldn't say just play. But I would say it is based around play and it is very important to have it in the curriculum as well. Like even in my circle time in the morning, I use puppets and they get to use them. And I use the felt board story thing and it gets them to interact and then I will let them play with it by themselves to see. And some of them have already learned the songs and the stories and I will use that in my play after.

Ellen believes in providing a variety of activities in her classroom to ensure that the children do not get bored. She does this by rotating among active and more passive activities throughout the day. For example, after snack she will let the children engage in free play for twenty minutes and then she does her circle time, which involves the children sitting for this period. She then leads the children towards a teacher-directed activity such as painting, corn meal, or water play, but she does not force the children to participate. If the children do not want to explore the prepared activity, they can engage in other free play materials. She also believes in using the children's feedback and requests to help her plan her day, saying for instance "a lot during lunch time I ask them what did you play with today and where did you play? What did you like? What would you like to do in the afternoon? And then again from what they tell me and we plan the afternoon on that."

Variety of play materials. Ellen believes that having a variety of play materials and specific play areas is extremely important when setting up the classroom. She believes that it is important to rotate the materials regularly to keep the children interested and to ensure that they do not get over stimulated with too many materials or under stimulated with too few materials.

She believes that it is important to make sure that the physical layout of her room affords many opportunities for social interactions and exploration and for children to engage in play with a variety of tactile and versatile materials. Imaginative play is an avenue that Ellen contends is a pivotal part of early childhood development, thus she has set up a dramatic area in her classroom that she rotates frequently depending on the children's interests. She describes here:

...we have the kitchen area, which has the fruits the vegetables, the pots and pans. There are the little skirts, the little shoes. I try to change them on a monthly basis and some of them if they are not interested at all I will just change them right away. I also create areas in the classroom. So if we talk about the farm I will change the pretend area into a farm. So I will put out the farm animals, the hay, and the clothes. And if it is the dinosaurs again, I will put out everything dinosaurs. So I use the pretend area a lot and bring that into it. And then they have available to them the coloring, the mini pegs, play dough, the wooden blocks, sand play, and the magical bottles that I have made with them.

The materials in the classroom reflect the children's interest and ever changing needs. Ellen believes that the environment must be appealing to the children; hence she spends a great deal of time focusing on the children's interests. Once she has a good understanding of their interests she can then decide what materials to take out, which ones to rotate, and when to introduce the next set of materials.

Promoting autonomy. As part of setting up the environment, Ellen believes it is extremely important that children learn to be autonomous. When setting out play materials and designing centers she constantly reflects on how to promote autonomy. She tries to promote self-help skills by having the materials accessible to the children so that they can select the toys themselves. For example, if they want to play with the puzzles,

they can go to the shelf and pick out the one they want, instead of having to always ask the adult to get the materials for them.

Ellen believes that it is important that children be able to make decisions for themselves. If a child decides that he/she wants to move from dramatic center and play with the puzzles, Ellen's job is to make sure that the child can do this on their own. She believes that "if the children constantly need to stop their play to ask the adult to get out materials that are inaccessible that this can stop the play scenario." Instead of having the children dependent on the adult, she believes in striving to develop their sense of self and independence.

Ellen believes an important part of the environment is its ability to foster autonomy. She tries to encourage the children to be independent and to problem-solve on their own as well as with the assistance of their peers. She talked about this belief in the video excerpt:

So I can get them to try and share. And then with the older ones if they need help to put on an apron I will encourage them to go ask A and she will come and help you. And I will say 'A come and help me hold the back', and she'll do the back and I will try and do the front. A lot of it is cooperative too because some of them are over three so I try to get more of collaboration to play together.

In sum, Ellen believes that the role of the environment in play is to provide the children with the necessary tools to interact autonomously, peacefully and respectfully with others.

Choices. Ellen believes that the classroom environment must provide the children with multiple options for free choice of play materials, choice of play partners, and choice of play areas. Ellen believes that it is important that the environment be set up in a way that respects the children's choices as they play and allows them to experiment and

discover. She does not believe in giving them restrictions about where the materials can be used in the classroom. She explained:

I am very open with that, like I usually, I put out some toys but if they want to bring like a car I am very flexible with that. I don't see why not, you know what will happen. I'm very flexible in that sense and I know like W loves cars and he is one of the children who does not like to participate in group activities. He really likes to free play on his own, so I thought of a car theme. I said 'why don't you bring your cars and use the paint.' So I got him to come into what we call a more teacher directed activity to do painting. Something different, not always cars on the carpet. So I incorporated that into my art activity, painting with cars.

Ellen believes that in order to set up the environment to meet the children's needs she needs to spend a great deal of time watching and listening to their interests. Once she knows their interests, it much easier for her to choose activities and put out materials that will continue to foster their overall development. Ellen draws my attention to the videotaped classroom processes where she describes just how her belief in giving the children choices in the environment can support their play. As we watched the video excerpt we see Child A, who was coddling her baby in the dramatic corner. Her peers were busy playing at the water table, while others were playing on the carpet with their cars. A covered her baby with a blanket and walked towards the water table, stopped for a brief instant and then turned back and slowly slid her feet over to the kitchen area. Ellen watched A as she hovered between the water table and the kitchen area. She then invited A to wash her baby "A let's give the babies a bath." A's eyes lit up and twinkled with delight at the idea of washing her baby and she quickly took the blanket off the baby's body and skipped over to the water table to give her baby a sponge bath. In this excerpt, Ellen explains that the environment allowed for free choice.

Ellen believes an important part of the learning environment has to do with bringing nature inside. She believes that her experience working with 3-year-olds has helped her understand the importance of bringing nature inside. She believes that children have an interest in nature and understanding how the world functions. She believes in bringing nature inside for the children to explore as she indicated here:

I like to talk about nature to see what we see outside. To really observe what we have outside that we don't have inside. And a lot in the winter I enjoy bringing what we have outside inside. We go out and we take snow we put it in the buckets and we do play with snow and then we see it melting. And then we watch to see what happens. So what stems from that often with the kids is we put water in the ice cube trays and put water in the freezer and it becomes ice. And then we look at the ice outside when it is hot and cold.

Ellen believes that the children really relish in these nature experiments. She believes that the environment and the educator must follow the interests of the group. She explains that one year she brought caterpillars inside as the children expressed an interest in learning about what happens in their life cycle. On another occasion one group of children expressed an interest in observing what an ant ate. One child found an ant outside crawling on a leaf and asked Ellen to bring the ant inside. They turned this into an entire project where they investigated what ants eat, how they survive, and their life expectancy. Ellen reiterates her belief in the importance of the learning environment and making sure that it is based on the children's expressed desires and needs.

Respect for the environment. Ellen believes that an important aspect tied with the learning environment is learning how to respect the space and the materials within this space. She believes that it is important for the children to take pride in their classroom and their belongings. It is imperative that the children learn to respect the

environment, materials, and their peers. She believes that “they have a lot of access to the materials and they learn to respect them too. And to be careful to clean up after themselves they are very good with cleaning” as she laughs. Ellen believes that through play children can learn a great deal about respecting the environment and their peers. She reinforces this belief by saying that “a lot of social interaction goes on as the children play. They learn to share and take turns and initiate play with peers. They learn to put materials away and to think of others-respect for others.”

In conclusion, Ellen believes that classroom environment play an important role in promoting play. Among the elements of importance were: regular routines, respect for the classroom and the materials, and the variety and choice of activities in promoting the children's autonomy.

Beliefs About the Impact of Training

As Ellen and I discussed her play beliefs we came across the relevance of her professional training in ECE and the impact this has had on her as an educator. Since she already held strong convictions about play as a result of her own positive play memories, Ellen believes that her training did not really impact or change her own beliefs about play. Ellen believes that growing up she learned a great deal through play, “picking up from my memories and from playing with friends and with the family.” As a result of her own life experiences, she believes she is now able to transfer this into the classroom and incorporates frequent free play. Even without her early childhood training, she believes that she would still set up the environment to afford as many opportunities for play and exploration as possible, because this was how she grew up and learned about the value of play.

Important factors related to her training that will be discussed below are: impact on ideas for planning, play knowledge, play and observing courses, the educator's role

Impact on ideas for planning. Ellen believes that her training did give her numerous activity ideas. For instance, she talked with great excitement as she explained:

...well the teacher that I had used to bring a lot of props such as puppets, felt board stories, uh feely boxes and we had some educational toys. And she had shown us hands-on how to manipulate these materials, and see what we think we could teach the children, and what we could learn from it.

She believes that the “hands-on approach” of her ECE program was extremely beneficial to her, especially as a novice educator. Ellen’s training may not have changed her opinions towards play, but she believes it gave her “more specific child-related knowledge.”

Play knowledge. Ellen believes that the psychological part of her training did impact her beliefs:

I found that interesting because again at every age play is different, with role play, pretend play, the symbolic play so that was interesting. And it was helpful knowing that, and then when we did it with the children you understand better. You have a more meaningful, deeper understanding of where they are at and where we they are going with it.

She even recollected a few theorists that she considered to be significant and that impacted her:

...well there was Piaget and the symbolic play, pretend play. They really focused on the role playing and again with younger children it was interaction and the imitation, there was a lot of that. And then we also spoke about the imaginary friends and how to go about it with that until the age of six. And then after that then you have to start looking a bit more like towards why and they explained that to us too.

She believes that her courses did help introduce new information to her such as the importance of scaffolding and extending the children’s play, which she attributed to

Vygotsky (1978) and his “zone of proximal development.” Ellen believed that the hands-on aspect of her program as well as the child development and theoretical aspects were extremely beneficial. She said that she liked how she could apply what she learned during her stages.

Play and observing courses. This section falls under both the title of training as well as the role of the educator. Ellen believes that her “Observing” and “Play” courses enabled her to be more aware and cognizant of the classroom environment and how she could directly impact the learning that was taking place. Here she explained this notion:

The intervention, we learned about the intervention how you just lay out the area and then if you see them losing interest you just go and provide a word or provide a new prop with it. And one thing I also learned was not to overwhelm them with too much stuff at once. Let's say the kitchen area you put out the fruit first and then you add the vegetables. And then indirectly you are teaching the fruits and vegetables. And to get each other, you know to share you say ‘go give Amy the strawberry’ or you are always adding.

Ellen believes that this aspect in her courses really enabled her as an educator to be more “aware of what the children were doing and to observe when they needed more guidance, prompting, or re-direction” from the adult in the room. She confesses that this is something she continues to work on even today, as she believes it is really a skill that continues to develop throughout one's career.

Ellen believes that sometimes as a student the wealth of information can be distracting, especially if you have not had previous experience with children. As a student, she believed that the information to be learned was at times overwhelming, for example to just have “theory, theory, theory”, but that once she was in the field everything started to make sense. She made a connection between learning and practice here, it is like finding a

perfect pair of shoes: “one really needs to try several on before finding the one that truly fits your foot.” Much like teaching, this metaphor applies to the classroom practice as an educator: one must try out various techniques and learning styles before finding the one that truly suits your beliefs.

The educator’s role in training. Ellen believes that her training was beneficial in helping her understand the role of the educator in the classroom:

And the role of the educator I find is also very important. Knowing when to intervene, and when to step back. One hard thing was because when we came out of school the educational part, the ‘teach, teach, teach’ and learning to step back and observe the children. And that is where I am right now and I am very happy with that.

Ellen believes that the learning how to develop and refine her observational skills in the classroom took much practice, but with practice and experience she learned how valuable it was to give children their space and let them explore on their own. Ellen believes that her training was influential in teaching her important observational tools such as the use of “anecdotes.” She explains that she learned how to do this in her training and she continues to apply this in practice today. She writes anecdotal records on the children while they are engaged in free play to determine where they are developmentally. These are the moments in the children’s play that she likes to capture, as they make for great stories to share with the parents. She believes that it is truly “amazing to sit back and observe the children in their play to see how they enter play, how they negotiate the use of materials, and decide on who will be the mommy and who will be the daddy.” She continues:

I take it in free play to see where they go. I focus a lot on their social interactions, who they play with a lot, how many times they move from one area to another.

And I kind of do running records or something like that. A sketch that I am able to come up with. And the checklist, I find is a lot faster when you have a lot of kids in the room. And then it is nice that every once a month like I try to sit down and do a global review about that area for that child.

Ellen also believes that certain practical elements of her training were especially useful. She explains, “puppets which is very important, I remember the puppets, uh musical instruments as well they used that. Ahh a lot of wooden games, wooden shapes, squares and colours and manipulatives and classification with the puppies and the bears. Uh rich materials I know are very appropriate.” She believes that by experiencing the hands-on application of these varying materials this helped her to incorporate many of the hands-on learning experiences into her own classroom. Ellen believed that her ECE training was an invaluable experience as she states here:

...very rich, like again with a lot of hands-on, they showed us a lot of props to make sure that we know exactly what it is that they are talking about, uh it was really hands-on a lot of concreteness. Not just talking about abstract things and a lot of asking us what we knew, like how we would do it with the kids to see what we know and then they used to take it from there and explain deeper.

On a similar note Ellen and I talked about how her beliefs towards play had changed following her 3-year training program and she responded by saying that “they are stronger, again from various experiences they become really stronger.”

In sum, Ellen believes that her training seemed to help her in planning play-oriented activities and in identifying her role in the children's play. Further, her Play and Observing courses appeared to be beneficial in reinforcing her own play convictions.

Challenges to Incorporating Play

Ellen believes that sometimes there are challenges to implementing play in the classroom. She believes that part of her role is helping the parents understand how the children construct their own knowledge through play interactions. She does explain that at times it has been difficult convincing the parents of the value of play for children's learning:

...they are very 'iffy' because they think it is just playing but they are not learning anything. It is not education so they want the ABC's and the 123's. So just like exposing it to them. The children are being very receptive right now so when they are ready with the maturity level, their brain then they will be able to show you what they have learned. But yet, they are very receptive and everything is done through play and we give the parents examples. One of the parents actually asked me if we were teaching them left and right. And I said no, I teach them at the elevators. You know we have to sit back and wait for the elevators I ask 'do you think the left one is going to come first or the right one?' And then they have learned left and right but through that I use that as an example in orientation-I didn't say 'this is your left hand and that is you right hand.' It is through play and then the ones who are more mature have the concept of that grasp it. And the others will say it but they are still manipulating with it.

Ellen believes that part of her role in facing this challenge is posting daily notes on the bulletin board for the parents and talking with them about their children's development helping them understand how they are learning through play. She records a key word next to the activity on the documentation paper in order to help the parents associate the play with a type of learning. For instance, during my observation Ellen pointed out some activities she had put out on the tables for free play including puzzles and bears. She explained that in this activity there was one little boy J who classified the bears in order of size from smallest to

biggest. So on the activity board, she wrote next to the bears “classification of colour, size and shape” and she believes that this seems to appease the parents, because they feel that the children are learning directly from the activity. Ellen believes that it is important for parents to see the concepts, for example whenever she does an art activity such as a shape painting she will include the names of the shapes they worked on such as square and circle.

Nevertheless, Ellen does not believe that this is art, because they are really learning a skill; she explained, “because for me art you shouldn’t be able to tell what the child is making.”

However, Ellen believes that convincing parents of the true value of play still remains a daily challenge. Some parents immediately see the connections between play and learning, while others still expect her to be teaching the children didactically to prepare them for elementary school. Ellen said as she smiled that she will “...continue to reinforce the significance of play as a learning tool and a stepping stone from one developmental milestone to another.”

Chapter VII: “They learn ahh through play” (Milena, 2006).

In the following section I will introduce Milena’s brief history, followed by her play beliefs and classroom practice.

Milena

Milena is a 28-year-old Canadian of Italian heritage who lives in the west end of a greater metropolitan city in Québec. She comes from a French-Italian heritage; her mother is French-Canadian and her father was born and raised in Italy. Milena was born in Canada, but spent many vacations in Italy with her family and relatives. She speaks three languages fluently: Italian, English, and French. Milena completed her education at a college in a greater metropolitan area where she studied Early Childhood Education in a 3-year DEC program. She is currently in her sixth year of teaching in a corporate (associated with a large company) CPE in a suburb metropolitan area. She has worked with the baby group for three years, the toddler group for one year, and with the 2- to 3-year-old class for two years. Her current classroom is the 2- to 3-year-old room; however the physical space is split with an older group of 3- to 4-year-olds.

During our various meetings several major categories emerged: (a) play beliefs impacted by memories of play, (b) beliefs about play, (c) beliefs about educator’s role in play, (d) beliefs about the role of the environment in play, and (e) impact of training on play beliefs.

Impact of Memories on Play Beliefs

Milena explained her life history and told me that the fact that she grew up with her grandparents was instrumental in the development of her play beliefs. When her parents went to work she “would spend my days with my grandparents,” never attending any sort of childcare establishment until she entered kindergarten. During this time with her family she developed “very positive memories of family gatherings, playing with my

grandparents using materials found around the house to extend the play.” She recollects playing outdoors with her family and the neighbors in the woods and in the yard, “exploring nature, twigs, and insects, everything around.” These early memories made a lasting impression on Milena and she believes because these memories were so positive this is what inspired her to work in the field of early childhood. Her early school memories were so impressionable that to this day she can still recollect the odors in her classroom, the colors on the wall, and where each play center was located within the classroom. Since her first group experience was when she was older than many children, Milena believes that it had an influence on her memories and the relationships she developed. She spent the majority of her time playing with adults in her early years, so when she entered kindergarten she remembered “being very scared, stand-offish, and not really joining the play with others but exploring on her own.” However, in early elementary she believes her exploratory play experiences helped her develop an understanding of the importance of play. She remembered “lots of hands-on activities” in her play as she “created different potions with household ingredients such as flour, baking soda, vinegar, and food coloring.” Her play experiences as a child also included many outdoor activities and Milena remembered “running outside, catching butterflies, collecting stones, and playing dress-up.” These memories for Milena played a vital role in developing her beliefs about play. She believes that if her memories of play were not so vivid and positive that perhaps her outlook would be different today.

As Milena moved into her adolescent years, she remembered a shift in the types of play that permeated her day. She believes that as children get older they move into different developmental stages, and along with these stages the interests and past times change as well. As an adolescent she began to engage in more team sports such as soccer, basketball, and baseball and also developed a greater interest in hobbies such as reading

and collecting beads. The types of play that she engaged in shifted based on her age and her interests “as I got older my play was different, I think because I was older and my interests changed.” She believes that her memories of play as a child and adult impacted her beliefs as an educator and “helped set the stage for what I do now in my own classroom (bringing in lots of hands-on activities, bringing the children outdoors to explore the world, bringing nature to the children).”

Milena reflected on her childhood memories, and reported that her passion for working with children really stemmed from her own life experiences, her own memories of play as a child, and her experiences as an adolescent. She explains here:

...before I started at College I had an aunt who had a home daycare. And I would spend my summers with her, and that's how I started to get into it. And it is the bulk of what I know now. Like she would have a home daycare, but she had like six or seven kids. She would like, I'd be like fourteen or fifteen... and she would leave me with the children who had to be fed, who had to be this, who had to be changed, and like a whole bunch of things. So I was able to pull it off, and this is like a job that, especially daycares, you have to be able to do ten things at once.

So I got to experiment working with her and just being in that experience.

Milena smiled as she told the story of how she first found her passion and direction for working with children. Milena believes that because her memories of play were so positive she wants to ensure that the children in her care also have positive memories of their time in the daycare:

...I guess being with the kids everyday, like I see them. I get to know them, what like interests them and how they learn. So I think my experience here has given me a bigger understanding of how play, well what is actually good for a child. Like all the learning and education and all that other stuff that people think 'oh

that is fun but it's not'. It's a whole bunch of other things that happen that if you

don't have that trained eye to say, 'oh look at that' he's used his left hand.'

Picking up all the little stuff that goes, that goes on when everybody else is busy.

In sum, Milena believes that her memories of play have impacted her current beliefs about play. She believes that because she was "exposed to different opportunities," which enabled her to explore through hands-on experiences in a supportive environment, this is what helped form her own beliefs and how she practices these beliefs in her own classroom. Her passion for education and play stem from her "own play experiences, as well as working in a home daycare" with her aunt.

Beliefs About Play

Fun and pleasure. Milena believes that play can take on many different meaning. She believes play is equated with fun and pleasure:

Well play means fun. Automatically I think of play it's got to be fun. And there's a lot of free play that goes around, that goes on in our class. So play to me, it just has to be fun.

Milena believes that play needs to be fun and pleasurable for the children. She also believes that the play does not have to involve the use of large scale toys that are commercially produced, but they can be home-made materials as this seems to catch the children's interest more frequently and for longer periods of time. As we observed the video, Milena shared a special moment in the classroom where we saw the children engaged in a pleasurable moment with open-ended materials and were playing with the washers and dryers in the dramatic corner. She explained to me that this excerpt really reinforces her belief that "play is fun and pleasurable and that it demonstrates how important it is to allow the children to explore with simple materials." Milena continues to explain that one of her student educators actually came up with the idea of making a

washer and a dryer from old boxes she had at home. Milena said that she followed this lead and then they created “a clothes line and brought in clothes pins and old clothing for the children to use, as well as laundry detergent and bounce sheets.” As we observed the children they all had assumed different roles; J was busy dressing her doll and K was busy transferring the laundry from the washer to the dryer. Then J approached K and reminded her to place a bounce sheet into the dryer so the clothes would not stick together. The children maintained their interest in this activity for over 45 minutes as they happily moved from one task to the other. At times these two children engaged in solitary and parallel play, but for the most part they engaged in cooperative play as they took on the role of mother and father.

Way to release energy. Milena believes that play “is necessary in order for the children to release some of their pent up energy.” She explained that the children in her care “are often at the daycare for eight to nine hours a day,” therefore they need to have time to unwind and enjoy themselves. She believes that through play the children have this opportunity to “release extra energy.” Just as the children were busy playing with the washers and dryers above, they also use outdoor time to run and exert excess energy. Milena believes in the relevance of lots of outdoor playtime (as she used to do as a child) and explained that during outdoor play “...children have the necessary space to move their bodies and explore as they climb, jump, crawl, run, skip and hop.” Often in the classroom Milena feels there is not sufficient space for the children to develop their gross motor skills. Therefore, she always ensures that the children have “time for using up excess energy by going outdoors daily or taking them to the gym.”

Self-motivating. Milena believes that play must be self-directed and intrinsically motivated (coming from the child). She clarifies this belief “...self-directed and is not forced upon the child, it must be intrinsically motivating.” Milena believes that when

children are forced to participate in activities the pleasure principle dissipates, hence the activity ceases to be play. If the children are not enjoying themselves then it is no longer play, and instead it becomes work for the children. Milena believes that play is something that is self-motivating, because it comes from within the child and is an inner desire to understand how the world functions. Milena believes that this intrinsic desire to play is something difficult to comprehend if you do not have a background in ECE. She explains; "it is an inner push or desire from the child's being to engage in play." She believes all children have an intrinsic desire to engage in play "...as they discover the world around them, how materials function in that world, and what their place is within that world."

Milena also believes that play is not something that is necessarily goal oriented. She believes that play is more about "...focusing on the process and allowing children to have an opportunity to explore in different ways." Milena draws my attention to an excerpt from the videotaped classroom processes where this belief is reinforced. In this excerpt we observed Milena singing a song to the children to let them know that it was circle time. She did not encourage or even request that the children participate in this activity. Instead, she took out her book titled *The Big Bad Wolf* and as soon as the children heard her read the title, they all came running over to participate. They started to chime in as the big bad wolf huffed and puffed and they giggled as they did so. Milena explained that this is an example of the children participating out of their own will. She believes that there was some intrinsic desire and motivation for each child to participate in this play activity.

Play after daily routines. Milena believes that "...play is something that happens after the daily routines are complete." In her class, the children know that "when their work is done, then it is time for play." For instance, she explained that when it is

time to water the plants, put shoes away, or put snack trays away, she defines this as work and not play. For Milena work is related to the daily schedule of the day, for example coming in from outdoors means the children need to take outdoor shoes off and put them away. She explained this belief further here:

...It can be something you need to do—I often use the word work in our class. When the kids have jobs to do—we are all working at doing what needs to be done. And when our jobs are done, ‘fine everything’s done, now it’s playtime.’

Learning and overall development. Milena also believes that play is equated with learning. She stated that “play is how the children transmit information,” for example playing with “something that is tactile, it’s hands on. I think throughout that play they’re working to get experience and all that stuff.” Milena believes that “learning goes hand-in-hand with play and the two cannot be separated from each other.” As the children explore their environment and play with various materials, “...they are learning about the functions of the materials, how they work, and what is involved in making the materials work.” In essence, the children are learning about themselves, what their capabilities are, who they are, and what place they hold in the world or more immediately in the classroom. Milena also believes that as children play they develop all areas of their core being, namely “social-emotional skills, fine motor and gross motor, language, cognitive, and aesthetics.”

Milena draws our attention to a particular excerpt in the video where she sees this belief being acted out in practice. It was someone’s birthday in the classroom, so Milena set up the lunch area with various materials for the cooking activity, as well as decorating tools such as icing, sprinkles, and chocolate chips. We skipped forward to the

decorating part on the tape where we saw all eight children sitting at the table waiting for their turn. Milena explained to me the learning that she believes was taking place:

...they're learning, you know, to sit there and wait for their turn and obviously you don't have eight kids decorating their muffins all at the same time. So it's pretty essential to this activity because you wouldn't want the kids to all rush over to get their stuff, their muffins decorated. They are even learning, you know, there are special occasions. They are also learning not to touch. I left the table and I can trust them enough.

Milena continued to explain her belief that learning was occurring through this activity. She believes that during this activity the children had the opportunity to develop their communication skills as they talked about the materials used and how they were using them. She believes that they were also developing their cognitive skills as they learned about making decisions, deciding how they would decorate, and what materials they needed to use. They talked about the different colors of icing and the sprinkles they poured on top of their muffins. Further, she believes that they were developing their social skills as they learned to take turns and to work with their peers as they passed each other the tubes of icing, the bowls of sprinkles, and the chocolate chips.

Milena also makes another connection between her beliefs about play and learning and the videotaped classroom processes. This time she refers to an activity she set up where the children are busy face painting using mirrors to reflect their faces. In this excerpt, S attempted to trace the outline of her face using the mirror to project her reflection. S held the mirror in her left hand and the pink crayon in her right. She slowly and carefully traced the outline of her face onto the mirror starting with her forehead first. S continued to draw her face filling in the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and hair. As she filled in the hair she used long strokes, while for the eyes she used more circular motions.

Milena described that as she observed S in her play she believed that learning was occurring, especially cognitive development, because S knew that the mirror was used to show her reflection. As well, S had plotted out a plan to outline her face first and then fill in the smaller details. Further, "...she was developing her creativity as she was making choices that reflected her artistic style choosing to shade in certain areas while using circular motions in others." Milena adds that she also was developing her "fine motor skills as well as her eye-hand coordination as she held her crayon in one hand, balanced the mirror in the other, and still managed to draw the features of her face."

Beliefs About the Educators' Role in Play

Responsive educator. Milena believes that one of her roles as an educator in the play "...was to follow the children's interests," by being a responsive educator. As she carefully observed each child she was able to "...understand their interests, where they liked to play, with what materials, with which children, and then could set up the environment to support these interests." An important part of her role in observing the children's interests is being a "responsive educator." It is her duty "to observe the children's interests and responses to activities and then to provide them with choices to extend their play." She has learned through her training and her own practical experiences that in order to be responsive to the children's needs, she needs to know what they are interested in and how to promote those interests. Milena talked openly about an "aha" moment that she had:

As time goes by, I started to realize, even if it's something I really organized, I had sat down, wrote it all up and everything happened on one topic. Sometimes it would flop, not because I was not well prepared for whatever my activity was but the kids weren't interested in whatever I was trying to put out there. So now it's

like I'll pay attention and see, you know, we've got the houses and stuff out.

We'll bring in the washer and dryer, we'll try it and take it from there.

Milena believes that part of her role, as a responsive educator "is to be sensitive to the children's verbal and non-verbal cues." As an educator she believes that she needs to recognize when the children have lost interest in a particular activity and be able to respond promptly. As stated above, sometimes even when she thinks she has planned a stimulating or interesting activity for the children it flops because they are not interested in that activity at that particular point in time. A responsive educator "must be able to take these cues and then focus on the types of play interests the children are expressing."

Milena shared an example from the video of her classroom processes of being a responsive educator and responding to the children's interests. Based on her observations she was able to surmise that the topic of the Big Bad Wolf was extremely popular among the children. As a result, she planned many opportunities for the children to explore this interest through their play. She set up the block corner with different colors, shapes and textures of blocks to encourage the children to build houses. She also provided them with masks of the pigs and wolves to continue to explore this interest through dramatic play. The reading corner had different puppets and flannel board pieces to encourage the children to explore through different media. She reported here, "We'll bring in the stories, like they were talking about the wolves a little while ago. Then we brought in the big bad wolf, the three little pigs and then we went for a nature walk, looking for the big bad wolf in the forest." She used the children's expressed interest in this topic to develop their play. Milena believes that play needs to be encouraged in many different ways:

...for the children, uh everything it has to you know have a mixture of like uhh.

You give them instances where uhh they can use their hands if they're smelling, all their senses. Play has to combine all of these things. You know, we set up all

these things and we give them the choice to follow where, what they'd like to choose.

Scaffolding. Another one of her roles as an educator is to facilitate the children's play "...by offering them support, guidance, and scaffolding when necessary." She explained further, "I mean we scaffold and we go uh like with the interests that they have." As part of her role in scaffolding the children's learning, she believes it is imperative to help set up the children for success. She believes in "giving the children the opportunity to work through problems and develop communication and social skills." She believes that it is important to give the children the necessary space to explore at their own pace; however, at times she must help them extend their play when she sees them struggling. She gave a practical example:

...my role, like uh if I try, like if I see a kid is struggling. Like last year, we had taken... I'll give you an example uh the grocery store. And the kids didn't really get like the concept of the money. Like I'm passing out the cash okay, somebody's behind the register and whatever. But they didn't get the concept of like having to pay and getting the change back. I will pick up on that and I'll see and then I'll just model it. So I'll like go in and it's like okay you know 'what did you buy today?' And I go in and I give them the example. And then I do it once and then I step back and try to see if they pick up on it you know?

Milena believes in scaffolding the children by extending their play in various ways. As she joined their play in the grocery centre, this enabled her to help take the children's knowledge of money and paying for materials at a grocery store one step further. She was aware that not all children were cognitively ready to grasp this concept at the same time. However, she did try and guide them towards that next level by modeling for them how money was used in accordance with her own beliefs. She also believes that other

children in the class can serve as "...scaffolders helping to guide their peers through the learning process." Part of this process involves giving the children space to play and to discover things on their own and through peer exchanges. She believes that "...children learn best from each other and through their own life experiences." As a result, she often tries to encourage the children to take part in the scaffolding process as well.

Milena draws our attention to an example of face painting from the videotaped classroom processes where she finds a connection between her beliefs and practice. She mentioned that when she first explored this activity with the children it was not as successful as she had anticipated. She explained that the children "...were much younger and they did not understand the concept of taking the crayons and dipping them into the water and then using the mirror to reflect what they had painted on their faces. Instead of painting their faces, the children would paint the mirrors." As we watched the video we saw the children smiling as they held their mirrors tightly in their hands. V smiled as she saw her reflection in the mirror and told Milena that she is going to paint a pretty picture. V gently pulled at the yellow crayon with her right hand and dipped it into the water. She continued to hold her mirror in her left hand as she eased back into her chair. She then began to trace an outline of her face using the crayon and the mirror to see her reflection. V then looked at Milena and told her that she was having trouble holding the mirror. Milena quickly intervened and suggested that perhaps she can ask one of her friends to help and in that way they could both take turns. Milena explained that in this particular episode she wanted to avoid doing the activity for V; "...rather wanted to empower her and help her extend this activity as much as possible by giving her alternatives to continue her play." Milena believes that this is an excellent example of how the scaffolding works in her classroom.

Modeling. Modeling is another important role of the educator in Milena's eyes. Milena believes that "...modeling is extremely important in play, especially for the educators in the classroom." She spoke about modeling not only in the play, but also throughout the day. Milena believes that "...children learn from the adults in their lives, therefore if the adults behave badly the children may imitate this behavior." A large part of the modeling for Milena has to do with respect. She wants the children to understand and demonstrate "...respect for themselves, their peers, adults, as well as for their environment and the materials in that environment." As the children are busy playing, Milena hears them asking their peers if they can enter the play, and asking what role they can play, therefore they are using their manners while asking politely for materials or to share toys. Milena believes that this is imperative for the children to learn through play and then to be able to extend this to the real world.

Documentation. Milena believes that part of her role, as an educator is to document the play that goes on in her classroom. She takes pride in her observations as each year the educators compile a portfolio for each child that they give to the parents as a keepsake. She explained to me "...originally the educators used simple checklists and would tick off the presence of a behavior." However, she said that the "entire staff now is on board with the use of focused portfolios." She explained the portfolios further, "And what it is, is like we're uh observing the children in their play, we're capturing the moment of that play in a picture and then after we have like ah a little anecdote. Like what's happening at the moment quote." Using this type of documentation "provides the parents with concrete examples of just how their children are playing, with what materials, and what skills they are developing through their play." She gave me a bird's eye view of how this process works:

...so if you have a picture of your child building with blocks and the developmental area is let's say uh-gross motor skills. Let's say he's in the gym and they're building with the blocks or whatever and he climbs up on a chair because he's trying to build his tower higher and higher. Like I'll take a picture and I'm going to write a little anecdote. Like a little setting of where we are... 'uh we're in the gym and J was building with blocks and this is what happened and his friend was beside him.' Like a little quick caption of what was going on.

She explained that there are seven developmental areas in which the educators compile data on each child throughout the year: social, emotional, cognitive, language, aesthetic, self-help, and physical development. As the year progresses the educators add new information, photos, and at the end of the year they put it together to give to the parents. This portfolio stays with the child throughout their years at the center, so in this way it also helps the next educator to understand the areas in which the child is excelling and also where they are still developing.

Beliefs About the Role of Environment

Eclectic approach. Milena believes in adapting an eclectic approach in the environment, as she took different aspects from various programs and adapted them into her classroom practice. She explained that she often uses the project approach in her room, "so kind of similar to like a project approach, kind of where you go with what their interested in or what the majority of them seem to show interest in." She believes that the children really respond well to this type of approach where she observes them, sees their current interests, and then plans for a variety of activities to stimulate these interests. "Once the children lose interest in a particular theme or topic, then I will change and adapt to meet their needs." Thus, the "curriculum and environment are ever changing" in response to the children's development and overall needs and abilities.

Flexible schedule. Milena believes that an important part of the learning environment is ensuring that it is flexible. Part of Milena's daily schedule involves "...being flexible in the routines and responding to the children's needs." Milena believes that children need routines and stability in their lives, so she tries to provide this daily (see Table 3 for the daily schedule). However, she believes that she does not have to follow this schedule to a tee. She explains:

...we have a schedule that we try to follow as best we can. But if the kids like today was a beautiful day. Like if it's really nice outside and I have like this activity planned. Uh I am probably gonna choose to stay out like an extra twenty twenty-five minutes with the kids because it's a nice day. So your ideas change of course and you go with the temperaments of the day.

She believes that her daily schedule and curriculum reflect the children's interests, moods, and temperaments. Milena has learned through her training, as well as her own experiences, that schedules need to be flexible and adaptable.

Milena explained that the children have free play from arrival in the morning until about nine when they have open snack. If they choose to leave their play, then they can come and wash their hands and have snack, if not they can continue in their play. Typically "...around 10 am they have a sit down activity depending on the weather; if it is nice outside then they may take the play outdoors."

Typically Milena believes in "leaving all areas of the classroom open for the children to choose where they want to play so they are able to pick a new play area once they have finished tidying up their previous toys." Milena believes in following the interests of the children in choosing what materials will be placed out daily. She explains:

...they know that and when we come in around 8:00 am we transfer from the opening group to our class. We always have six or seven kids to initiate what material comes out. If they run over and they take out dinosaurs, stickmen or whatever it is; that's pretty much what's going to be set out for the morning. I won't go there and just put things out and say 'Here's what were doing today,' unless J or D who are getting into an argument, arguing or whatever.

Milena believes in fostering a child-directed environment, that is one where the children can choose the materials with which they want to play.

Curriculum. Milena believes that a curriculum, which centers on play, is necessary for young children. Milena believes that play is really what happens all day, except for the routines and transitions (bathroom, snack, nap time). She continued, "I find kids learn, the children learn so many things through play." She connected this belief about using play in the curriculum to help children learn to an example from the classroom processes video where two children begin to argue over the same toy. Milena first observed as the children discussed who had the toy first and then she gave them the chance to problem solve together before stepping into the play. She believes that this is a great example of the problem solving that occurs during play, as well as noting the language skills that the children develop through their play. In this particular episode, the children resolved the conflict on their own and decided to take turns and share the truck. Milena explained:

...you know turn taking...there are so many things that happen; that it seems like we're playing most of the day. And it's like uh self-teach child directed activities where the children lead the play. Just amongst them, we set up the classroom in a way that you know we're giving them like uh the environment to explore the space that they need.

Milena believes that in a play based environment the children are able to take control of their play and they can move from station to station of their own volition, while managing problems as they arise. She believes that in her classroom play is at the heart of the curriculum as the children lead the experiences through exploration.

Autonomy. Milena believes that another important element of the learning environment is that it helps develop the children's autonomy as much as possible. She believes that the best way to do this is to make sure that all materials are set out in a fashion that enables the children to access the materials on their own, as well as ensuring the materials are age-appropriate. When one enters her classroom, all materials are at the children's eye-level and are easily accessible. Milena also believes that the "...materials are rotated on a regular basis, in order to continue to stimulate the children's creative juices." Milena explains:

The toys, I make sure we interchange them like it's not always the same blocks, play dough and stuff like that. So we have a way of spicing up the room we'll bring things in from next door. You know the fancier cars (older age group) and uh we'll change the books maybe every week and a half depending on what the kids are into.

Materials. Milena believes that another important part of the learning environment are the materials within that environment. The "materials need to be child-sized, age-appropriate and focus on the children's interests." Also important is being "flexible as much as possible in allowing the children to bring various materials to different areas of the classroom" as they play. She does, however, believe in making safety her number one concern, "As long as the kids are safe, they're respecting the toys and they're respecting each other." If for example, the children "have the big wooden blocks. They already have a hard enough time tidying that up. I won't be too keen to

have them carry the wooden blocks all the way over to the carpet.” She also believes in encouraging the use of materials for unintended purposes, but Milena always stresses the safety of her children, first, and foremost. She believes in extending their play as much as possible by allowing them to follow their instincts and desires, but at the same time she wants to prevent any undue harm.

Milena believes in “setting up the classroom in order to stimulate different types of play such as parallel, group, as well as solitary play.” She believes in setting up various learning centers for the children to use with few restrictions such as: the block building area; art center with scissors, crayons and writing materials; a dramatic corner (which is being turned into a grocery store); a carpeted area with puzzles; a quiet area with books; and of course, cars. She believes that on occasion it is acceptable to place a limit on the number of children who can play at a particular center if she feels the play has become static. She explained “sometimes certain children only play at one center, all day, everyday.” She does not believe that this is a problem, but she does want to encourage the children to explore different areas and other avenues in their play. Hence, at times she may repeat, “okay, we have five friends here so maybe we can try to play somewhere else.”

Milena explained that the educators are very fortunate at her center, because any materials or supplies that are needed can be acquired simply by asking the director or purchasing it themselves (for reimbursement). She shared an example of this accessibility of materials, “let’s say the other day we did goop, that I need cornstarch and we don’t have it. Like I’ll go out and pick it up and I’ll leave my receipt in the box and they’ll reimburse us.” She believes that she has the full support of her director and that she never lacks materials or support.

Impact of Professional Training on Play Beliefs

In our interviews and during the IPR process, Milena said that her "...very first year of teaching was quite stressful"; because she felt she had many activities to plan every day. However, despite this stress she really learned to take a deep breath and go with the flow. As part of her training program, Milena had to develop and reflect upon her very own philosophy of education. Milena believes that developing her own philosophy of education is very important as it guides her in the choices she makes on a daily basis. She expressed this philosophy to me, "I strongly believe that children play in an environment that is safe where they have the opportunity to play with one another. My philosophy of education all comes down to children learning from themselves and giving them the right tools. And I like to watch and see what they do with these tools." Milena believes that "if adults arm the children with the elements that they need, such as proper guidance, modeling, scaffolding, and many rich, hands-on experiences that the children can achieve anything." Basically, Milena believes that children are "intelligent beings that are able to learn from each other, and the experiences," that they, themselves choose and direct. Milena does feel that her training has been helpful in many different aspects. She describes these aspects in the following sections.

Role of courses. During her 3-year DEC program in ECE, Milena believes that some of the different courses she took "enabled her to focus on developing and refining her beliefs about play and children's overall development." She reflected on these courses, "And at school we had like many courses, like play, different kinds of play, how children learn, our uh psychology courses." Milena believes that she benefited from her training most when she was able to apply all that she had learned to the classroom setting. She remembered specifically learning about planning activities for various age groups, and focusing on their developmental milestones. She explained further, "...or all these

other things while they're working their finger muscles uh or eye coordination and stuff like that. So that helped me a lot. My training helped me see all the little detailed stuff that I would have totally missed out on." Milena believed that her overall training in ECE proved to be beneficial in that it helped guide her through "understanding different developmental milestones, how to set up the physical environment (i.e., materials, different activity areas), and how to develop play skills and abilities," something she may not have learnt on her own.

Play development. Milena recalled taking a course in her college training that was specifically geared towards "Play and Child Development." She believed that for her herself, this course was "extremely helpful in learning about intricacies in play" and refining her own beliefs. She always believed in the relevance of play prior to her training, but she "never knew what toys to use to stimulate the children's development or how to enter the play and help extend the children's play." She believes a pivotal experience in this course for her was "using the lab school" where she would sit on the opposite side of the one-way mirror and observe the children as they played in the classroom. She believed that this course, in particular, was helpful in that:

...we would observe children and the class taught us how to like uh record like the things that were happening in a certain setting. So uh we would observe and learn about how to prepare an early childhood setting. And how does that work, and every like every theme had like some topic. Uh, and she would {referring to the teacher} show us all these old fashioned toys. And we would go around the class and we would see how it would feel for us. She was a very smart woman, she comes in once and a while to uh supervise students.

Milena believes that from this play course she "learned how to observe the children while they played and when and how to intervene." She believes that this was a valuable skill

to learn and she goes back to this skill daily, as she watches the children play, who they play with, and what materials they use as they play. However, despite the training she received, she still believes that this is a task that is quite challenging. She explains:

You know, you can know all that, these things and know what you're looking for.

But the kid that is always sitting on his own; is it a problem if he has no language? Like you'll analyze it as much as you can. But in the end it all comes down to like knowing what, knowing your child. And like you know is there a problem that ah you know is he not playing with somebody else because there is something he can't transmit or communicate to them in a certain way? So it's like you look at everything you know, but I try to like get to know my kids and then I try to see what exactly the problem is you know.

Another important aspect from this play course that Milena believed was instrumental was "learning how to adapt the environment and activities to meet the children's needs." She continues:

...if you have a classroom where you have a child who has like uh, I don't know like a learning disability or something. Like how would you get him more involved in like the classroom or with friends or whatever you know; just learning from your peers sometimes it's different.

Milena believed that this was yet another aspect that helped refine her beliefs and enable her to make more informed choices.

Theories and child development. Milena believes that her training in ECE was significant in that it exposed her to "different theories related to play and child development," something that she was not exposed to previously. She said, "And uh we mostly learned about all the people that influenced uh children, and we again have taken a different approach. Like the planning and preparing a curriculum for the kids." Milena

admitted that she does not remember the names of the theories or theorists, but she remembers the impact they had on her, and this is what is of greatest importance. She believes that these theories and theorists influenced her choice of materials for her classroom, the way she sets up the environment, how she talks to the children, and how she helps develop their play. She believes that for her, learning specifically about child development and particular developmental stages that the children must pass through at various ages was essential. Milena believes that her training really helped her understand that "...each child is unique and that learning and development is a qualitative and not quantitative process." Also, she believes that her program helped her understand that development happens over time in increments, not all at once. Milena attributes learning about the "...different types of play and the social aspects associated with each level," to her training. She believes this aspect of her training to be useful, in that it gave her the "...skills to observe the children's play and learn how to guide and extend the play." Even the scaffolding she uses in her class can be attributed to what she has learned in her ECE program.

Milena believes that her program introduced her to learning about specific approaches, such as "the project approach to play and learning," and that this was an approach that she found to be extremely useful in her classroom practice. She believes that the "curriculum should come from the children" as advocated by the project approach where the children are allowed to choose the topics. Milena recollected one particular year, where she had many pregnant mothers with expectant older siblings in her classroom. She said "...that year the baby themes really took off" and she was able to respond by setting up the environment to suit the children's needs because she had learned about this aspect in her training and how to respond appropriately. She set up the classroom with a changing table, diapers, baby clothes, baby bath, and left this set up in

the room for several weeks until the children moved onto the next theme. Milena believes this example shares her belief in the importance of using the project approach with the children, as she feels it was the best approach to ensure she attended to their interests and needs.

Overall, Milena believes that her training was beneficial in helping her to “develop the necessary skills to support play in the classroom, learning how to observe the children’s play and support and extend that play, in choosing age-appropriate materials to support open-ended play as well.” Nevertheless, she also believes that her own life experiences (memories, childhood and adolescent experiences, experiences prior to training) played a large role in influencing who she is and the choices she makes daily. She explored this belief here:

But all these things you pick em up and learn as you go. No matter how much school or how many experiences you have; it’s like every day is different here. And it’s like you start to mould yourself into a certain, like you have a way of uh teaching these kids and you know running your classroom and things like that. And it’s all those experiences, things you’ve experienced yourself that make you who you are today.

In sum, Milena believes that her ECE training reinforced her previous belief about play, and enabled her to make decisions that would empower the children within her classroom.

Sharing aspect of her training. As part of her training, Milena recalled spending valuable time dialoguing with her classmates about various concepts. Milena remembered, “discussing how to adapt the environment to extend and develop the children’s learning.” She believes this type of interaction and dialoguing with peers to be invaluable. When confronted with a challenge, she would go to her “colleagues and brainstorm a variety of strategies to support the children” in her classroom.

Challenges to Implementing Play

Milena believes that part of her job as an educator is attempting to overcome some of the challenges she faces in implementing play in the classroom. One of the challenges that she believes she is faced with “is ensuring that the parents are on board.” She believes that the “...parents in general often are too focused on time, and everything is so fast paced that the children do not get the opportunity to explore the world around them.” She believes that there are some parents who “...want product-oriented work in the classroom.” She believes that part of her job is to reassure these parents that the children are learning through play. She explains this belief:

...that constant having to prove what you are doing sometimes. A lot of times parents want the product. It's like where's my “pumpkin”. It's like you know what, we're doing other things you know. So you have to be able to explain to the parents like this is what we do. This is why we decided to do it and your kid loved it and that was basically the whole purpose of it you know.

Milena believes that “we live in a fast paced society and parents often want to ensure that their children can perform.” She believes that some of the “parents start to reflect on what they were able to do as children, at certain ages, and then panic when they realize that their child is four years old and he cannot write his name and he/she does not know his/her letters.” In her experience she believes that some parents start to ask questions and automatically think something must be developmentally wrong with their child. “I really try and help the parents calm down and realize that each child develops differently and at their own pace, so if they haven't learned to spell their name yet, it doesn't mean it won't happen, it just means they haven't developed that interest yet.”

When dealing with parents, Milena believes that she has to get them to see things from a different perspective, something she also learned in her training. She explained

further about the "...parents' constant need for quick results, that is the end product..."

She adds:

Sometimes on Monday morning, I ask 'how was your weekend?' 'Oh, my God, we had soccer, we had hockey, we had this, we had that!' It's like why didn't you take ten minutes to talk with your kids, you know see how things are going.

You're running from place, to place, to place. You have two or three kids and you're running around like a chicken without a head.

Milena believes that this type of life style can become overwhelming "...because the parents assume if they load the children's schedules with all these extracurricular activities, it means that their children will be smarter and they will have an advantage over their peers." Milena sometimes feels overwhelmed by the parents, who just do not understand the value of play, and what role it plays in their child's overall development. She maintained, however that she believes in the value of play, as this is still a prime concern in her classroom, despite these external pressures.

Chapter VIII: “I mean that’s why for me it’s really important to let them play because that’s how they get to develop their likes and dislikes” (Tania, 2006).

In the following section I will introduce Tania’s brief history along with her specific play beliefs and practice.

Tania

Tania is a 30-year-old Canadian Caucasian female who resides in a large metropolitan area in Canada. Tania’s parents are of Irish and Scottish descent; however, she has never traveled to her parent’s homeland. At home, growing up, Tania spoke mainly English as her mother tongue, but is also fluent in French. Tania is a mother of two boys aged 3 and 5-years who both attend the college based CPE where she works.

After great reflection, Tania chose to follow her passion, which was working with children, by studying at a local college. She completed a 1-year, intensive Attestation program in Continuing Education in Early Childhood Education. Tania began her career working with children prior to commencing her Attestation program. She started working as a “floater” (she did not have her own classroom but would work in all classroom as an extra educator) in a CPE for two years, where she moved around from one age group to the next (i.e., toddlers to 5-year olds). Once she realized that this was the path she wanted to pursue, she decided to return to her studies and completed her Attestation full-time. During the time of the data collection, she was working in the 4- to 5-year-old classroom, where she had spent the last two of her six years teaching in ECE in a college campus based CPE in the downtown metropolitan area.

From a variety of sources, namely the interviews, IPR, and video tapes of Tania’s classroom processes, several key categories became apparent: (a) Impact of childhood memories on play beliefs, (b) beliefs about play (sub categories fun/pleasurable, learning), (c) beliefs about the educator’s role in play, (d) beliefs about the role of the

environment in play (sub categories curriculum, materials), and (e) impact of professional training on beliefs.

Impact of Childhood Memories on Play Beliefs

Tania believes that her own childhood memories of play have had an important influence on her play beliefs. She spoke fondly of her own play memories as a child growing up in the country with her parents and grandparents. She explained that there was a huge field in back of their home where she and her sibling spent endless hours exploring all that nature had to offer. She remembered, "...playing outside in the summer until it was dark and my mother would call my sister and I to come in and get ready for bed." She added that she "used to have so much fun playing with the outdoor natural elements." She believes that having had these important memories of playing outdoors with her sibling and her family have influenced the relevance of outdoors play for her in her own classroom today.

Another element that Tania believed played an important role in her development of play beliefs was the types of play she used to engage in as a child. She recalled engaging in frequent imaginative play, "we didn't really have toys. We had, like things that we made for toys. We used a lot of our imaginations. We made a tree house, we used rocks as telephones." She said that in their play, she and her sister did not need the large-scale commercialized toys with which children of today have to play. They were able to "...enjoy ourselves simply by using household materials and then extending the play by using our imaginations." Tania believed that having experienced such wonderful memories of open-ended and hands-on play experiences really helped define her beliefs about the importance of play. She also recollected "engaging in a great deal of physical activity, running and jumping through the fields, and making obstacle courses to run through." She added that they did lots of biking; we "did a lot of biking, you know,

because we had such a huge place to bike.” Tania believes that much of what she does today with the children in her own classroom can be reflected by her own childhood play memories. She “will often take the children outdoors and let them explore the yard or take them on nature walks to see the world around them because this is something I learned to do through my play.”

Tania believes that some of her fondest memories were when she would spend time following her grandfather around. She chuckled as she expressed this memory, “you know following my, my grandfather was always fun. It was like play for me. It was work for him, but it was play for me getting into his tools and stuff like that.” Tania believes this is why now in her classroom she encourages the children to explore with real hammers and nails because she was exposed to this type of learning as a child.

Tania believes that the types of play she engaged in began to shift when she reached adolescence, as her family moved from the country to the big city. She believes that as she got older her interests shifted, as did her stages of development. She expressed this transition here, “I didn’t really have big, open spaces but you know we were at the park a lot. My sister and I were very close. So we used to go to the park a lot, and just, you know try and do the same things that we did; obviously when we were younger.” Her play shifted towards more organized sports, such as swimming, and a lot of physical activity. Tania explained that she never participated in a competitive team sport, but engaged in group sports for fun. Although her interests changed, she recalled using her imagination in her play as a teenager; so this remained a constant throughout in her younger life. She reported here, “Yah, you just get up and go make up games along the way.” So, imaginative play was always present, but at a different level. Also, she enjoyed playing board games as she got older, as this required more sophisticated thinking and reasoning skills.

As an adult, Tania believes that play is still important, but instead of playing for her own pleasure, she plays and follows the lead of the children in her classroom. She reported that she tries to, “you know, I try to do things that I did when I was a child with the children outside.” She believes that when playing with the children she needs to be cautious not to influence the types of play the children engage in, instead she tries to encourage them to be independent and create their own games using their imaginations, just as she remembers doing as a child and adolescent. She explained more here, “Um, I try not to give too much info on the games. I try to see what their ideas are to kind of establish things as they go. And of course, the rules change as they go, but that’s ok; they always did when I was young.” Tania believes that her own experiences with games with rules are part of why she now brings them into her own classroom. She believes that sometimes it is difficult for her to watch them play and not intervene, but she believes that it is important for them to learn how to play games with rules, and let them work through conflicts and negotiate on their own.

She remembered being given lots of space and flexibility in her play as a child, and she believes that this should be an important element in her classroom as well. She believes it is important to give the children space to explore on their own without having constant interference: “Just letting them explore like I did. Um, using simple things you know. I try to avoid, I don’t really have any battery-operated toys in the room. I mean they’re ok, but I just think it’s easier to imagine, imagine things.”

In sum, Tania believes that her memories of play served an important role in helping her determine the value of play and in guiding her own curriculum objectives.

Beliefs About Play

Fun and pleasure. Tania believes that play, in her mind, has multiple meanings. Primarily, she believes “that play should be fun and pleasurable.” She believes that as the

children play, "that you have to have fun and enjoy it you know, be into it." Tania believes that there is a pleasure factor associated with play, and if the children are not having fun and enjoying themselves, then it is not play. She believes that play cannot be forced, because it needs to come from within the child and emanates from an inner desire to explore the world.

Learning. Tania believes that through play children are learning and "developing all of the skills that are necessary for a lifetime." Tania believes that "one cannot separate learning from play, because as the children are busy exploring new textures, different materials; they are in fact learning new information." Tania draws my attention to the classroom videotaped processes, where she connects her beliefs with practice. On the videotaped there were four children who were sitting at the art table, each with a pair of scissors cutting various materials as they made a collage. Child M asked her friend if she could pass the green zigzag scissors, so she could make designs on her card. Child S placed her scissors down, sifted through the bin of scissors, and gently picked up the pink scissors and handed it to M. M said 'thank you' and continued to talk to the other children at the table. As we observed the interactions, Tania explained the learning she believes was happening:

...you know, like if you look at fine motor, when you have activities that, like the cutting here in the art center. There are so many things revolved around that and if they are socializing, they're talking with the other children, so that adds language.

Tania continued to describe the learning she believed was taking place as these four children were busily engaged in their activity. She talked about the cognitive skills that were involved as the children made choices and decisions about what they would do and take steps to achieve their goals. She also believed that they were "...learning about

negotiation, as we discussed how to share the materials among ourselves.” Further, she believed that this group of children was also showing signs of respect for their peers, for the materials in the classroom, and for themselves.

Tania also made another connection between her beliefs and the classroom processes. In this excerpt two children were busily engaged with story books. They had set out a stage, which had various characters that accompanied the story book. As we observed the children playing, we saw one child taking the lead. She told her peers that she would be the princess, Cinderella, and that M could be the step-sister, and later they would switch roles. They started to turn the pages of the book and J began to tell her rendition of the story. In her story of Cinderella, the wicked step-sisters made Cinderella do all the chores, wiping the floors, cleaning the toilet, until a little mouse arrived and told Cinderella about the royal ball. Tania believed that in this excerpt, she saw so much learning going on between these two girls. She expressed this belief here:

well it's language, first of all, social skills-being able to work together to create a story. Imagination-being able to recite, especially when it's the Cinderella story. And, they know them from the movies. They know exactly how it goes. It's in their memories, their cognitive skills. And if they don't agree with each other, well then it's negotiating.

Beliefs About the Educator's Role in Play

Scaffolding. Tania believes that one of her roles is “to scaffold the children and help extend their play, in any way possible.” Tania believes it is important to “encourage the children to be curious and to know that they are in a safe environment, where they can seek answers to their questions, and take risks.” Tania clarifies:

It's part of their natural environment, things that they can relate to. You know, questioning things is always important. When they stop questioning, you're like,

‘hummm, is everything ok?’ You have to evaluate something. Or even if you don’t know the question, or the answer, kind of like, ‘ok, well let’s look into that, that’s something we can do together.’

Often, Tania believes that one of the other children in the classroom, who may have had knowledge on a particular topic, can come and help his/her peers work through the problem or questions together. Tania believes in providing the children with as much support as needed, but she believes it is important to know when to step back, as well.

Joining the play. Tania also believes another one of her roles “is joining in the children’s play, when invited.” She believes that she needs to be careful not to intervene or interject when not requested, but she believes it is important to also show the children that she knows how to play. Often the children will delegate and tell her what role they want her to play. For instance, Tania shares an example from the classroom processes where the children were busy building their castle in the block area and they asked Tania to be their queen. They brought her a robe to wear, dress, high heels, and they even made her a crown. Tania interacted with the children for several minutes engaging in her role as the queen and then graciously stepped back, and explained to the children that she was going to do a puzzle while she encouraged them to continue their play. Tania believes that it is important, as an educator, “...to know when to step back.” She does not want the children to become overly dependent on her for play roles and scripts, so this is why she will play, but then she will step back, and let the children control the play scenario.

Tania believes that it is important to avoid joining the children’s play when they ask her to play in the art area. She explained that she does not want to provide a model for the children of how to create a product. Sometimes when the children are struggling with creating something, they will go to her, and ask her to draw it. Tania makes a connection to this example in the classroom videotaped processes. One child was trying

to draw a circle and each attempt seemed to be unsuccessful for her. She then called Tania over to the table and explained her dilemma. Instead of drawing the circle for her, Tania asked her if she could use an object in the class to trace the form of the circle. The child looked around the room, and finally got up from her chair and walked slowly over to the marker bin. She picked up an old coffee container and placed it on her paper, holding it with her left hand, as she traced the circle with her right hand. She looked up at Tania and smiled. Tania praised her as she emphasized the efforts that the girl took to complete her task. Tania described here:

I don't draw, I don't do anything like that. I don't want to make them feel bad about what they're doing. So there's certain things I don't do, art being number one. If they want something, like if they say 'can you make this for me?' I'll say 'you can do this.' Say it's a circle, 'okay what can we use for you to trace and make your own circle?' And they'll learn to use other things in the room to make what they want.

Tania wants to make the experience positive for each child and believes by encouraging the children to attempt the task on their own that it is a more constructive approach. She adds, "So, I think it's more constructive in that sense, cause you're encouraging them to do it on their own. It is true, if you do draw for them, they're going to always compare that."

Flexibility. Tania believes another part of her role as educator involves being flexible. She believes that in order to help extend and develop the children's play she needs to have an open-mind and be adaptable. She referred to the planning board, which the children use quite often, especially in the morning. This is a white board that is hung on the wall in the circle area with pictures of the different learning areas in the classroom (i.e., art, science, blocks, dramatic play, reading, writing, manipulatives). Her goal in

using this tool is “to encourage the children to reflect on what they would like to do during the morning period, and how they would like to do it.” However, she does not believe in being rigid in using this board. If the children show an interest in going outdoors to play because it is a nice day, or they want to play in the snow, she will follow their lead. Tania believes “in letting the children know that the schedule and routines are flexible” (See Table 4 for daily schedule).

Tania believes part of being flexible is “being able to change or adapt plans based on the moment and the interests of the children.” Tania gave an example:

Because we usually do group time after the, after the play. And you know sometimes it's like I'll change my ideas. I'll do something else so that I can relate to what they have done in the morning. Sometimes bringing more knowledge to that. Or you know, sometimes they'll be more motivated to look at the story or play a game. Yah, that's the thing too, sometimes they play it in the morning and they're kind of like, 'I don't want to do this, let's just go outside.'

Tania believes strongly in having a routine, but she says, “you have to be willing to change it.”

Offer choices. Tania believes that part of her role “in encouraging the children's play is to ensure that they have many choices.” She believes that it is imperative that she “follow the children's lead, and provide them with numerous choices as they play in the classroom.” According to Tania, part of being a good educator has to do with an ability to respond to the children's needs. Tania believes that part of offering the children choices has to do with developing keen observation skills. She believes in taking “...time each day to just sit back, observe, and listen to what the children are doing and saying.” She believes by observing the children, she can in turn, get a better understanding of their interests and where they are developmentally. She explains, “giving children

opportunities to make decisions and to choose their own games, play partners, and types of play helps them to build character and creativity.” She believes that giving children choices helps to develop their creativity and learn to develop ideas on their own.

Process versus product. As an educator, Tania believes “...it is important to focus on the children’s process as they are playing, rather than focusing on the end product.” She believes that educators often lose sight of this, because they want to show the parents a finished product. Tania shared her beliefs here, “I uh, yeah I’m not really product oriented, you know. It’s not the final product, the princess, you know? It’s much more interesting to focus on the process, than if every single one of them looks the same. How boring is that? That’s what I say.” Tania believes that children are very perceptive; if children feel as though they always need to create a carbon copy of something, they will never develop their own style or their own flair. She believes that children “...who attend programs where they are taught to create the same cow, the same horse, the same person, will be very lost when it comes time to actually create something on their own, using their own skills.” Tania believes in instilling confidence in the children, as early as possible, to be themselves and to follow their own wishes and desires.

Documentation. Tania believes that a final role of the educator in play is the use of documentation. As part of the children’s on-going assessment, Tania also uses focused portfolios as a way to monitor the children’s growth. Tania believes that by using portfolios, she is “able to set goals for the group as well as individual goals.” Rather than using a simple checklist format, where she goes down a list and checks off the presence of a behavior or skill, she collects data on the children throughout the year. As the children are busy playing, she will take little snapshots with her digital camera to capture the moment. Later, Tania will go back to that image and record a brief anecdotal or narrative that explains what the child was doing and saying as he/she played. She

explained, “we go by domains because we do focused portfolios. I go like specifically, so for me when I’m watching them play I always have those seven milestones in mind, just watching what they do.” Tania explained the seven milestones: “social, emotional, language, cognitive, self-help, aesthetic, and physical (fine motor/gross motor).” Further, Tania discussed the use of focused portfolios:

Well, usually when you accomplish a milestone like you only focus on one and it’s usually one that appears more often than others. You know say if they’re in the reading and writing area, you know, it would be ‘are they writing and drawing pictures, that would be a milestone.’ If that’s something that you often see them doing, that would be a milestone accomplished or a milestone that they’re working on, or it would be something that would be apparent. So at first, when you start your portfolio, you can’t just jump into it. You have got to know the children, and you have to get to know where they’re at. I don’t really base it on what the last teacher’s done either. I usually start fresh, because not everyone has the same interpretations. So the thing is, you might see it once and it might never happen again. So you really have to keep that in mind and focus and set goals for them, short term and long term.

Tania believes that this type of assessment is really helpful for the parents, “because it shows them exactly what their children are learning and how they are learning.” Tania referred to an example from the video clip where one child at the beginning of the year was very shy and socially withdrawn. When this child would arrive in the morning, she would wander about the room, and rarely engaged in play with her peers. Now, after the Christmas holidays, she had returned rejuvenated, almost as though she was a different person. She now approaches her peers and initiates group play. Tania smiled as we observed the videotaped classroom processes as T skipped over to the block area where

the boys were busy building a ship. The girl then brought in her books and chalk and started to tell them that she was the teacher. The entire play scenario changed as the boys began to create desks for the teacher and asked what they could do in the play. Tania reflected on this scenario here:

That's what I think is great. I mean even, it's amazing how far she has come along. Like she had some time off at Christmas, and just to see her get back into it, how she developed over time. She's getting really involved, instead of watching. At this point (on the tape), she was more often alone and more often observing a lot of things. So that she could acquire the language and the different things to get into the play. She and V get along so well, they're so silly together now.

Tania believes that this type of documentation really captures the children's development over time, and allows her "...to pinpoint when each child is requiring more one-on-one time or more social interaction."

Beliefs About the Role of the Environment

Curriculum. Tania believes that "it is important to have a balance between both teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities throughout the day." She called it a mix of ideas: "So it's like a mix of ideas and that way I can, so in that sense my practice kind of changed, evolved." She explained that prior to her training she used to do more teacher-directed activities, whereas now her focus is more on the children's interests and needs. Tania connected this belief to the videotaped classroom processes where all the children in the morning were busy choosing three areas where they planned to play during the free play portion. The children chose and put their names next to their choice of activities in order from one to three to signify the sequence of their play choices:

It's both actually, teacher and child-initiated activities. See we had a plan for the morning, giving them the ability to choose what they want to do and come up

with an idea and follow through on it. Um, play with their ideas. It has a lot to do with their cognitive development and cognitive skills. What they're gonna do, what they're gonna use, and how they're gonna go about it, and then watching them go through it. And it's not, it's okay that they change their ideas along the way because obviously that's what happens. But it's just to see them start with something and see where they go from there.

Tania believes that it is important to encourage the children to think about what they would like to do, because this avoids aimless wandering around the room. She prefers that the children give their play some forethought, and if they decide to do something different afterwards, then albeit.

Tania believes that play is a core element in her curriculum, "it's, it's like everything, especially with the programming that I implement, it's core." Tania believes that part of establishing the daily routines and activities is giving the children a voice. She talks to them daily about what they would like to do, and then tries to set out activities based on their interests. Tania believes that if she "...sets up the classroom so that it is visually and creatively appealing, different types of play will naturally occur." She tries to provide the children with new materials to explore on a regular basis and rotating materials every few weeks, or as the children's interests change, in order to keep them motivated and interested.

Daily choices. Tania believes when the children are not given choices in their play and are forced to do something they do not want to do, it no longer defines the pleasure principle, and therefore ceases to be play. Tania recalled being forced to participate in activities as a child, "I did it, but if the motivation wasn't there, it was nothing' 'did they learn anything? No, not really.'" Typically, she expects "...the children to share what their choices are for the morning, but they do sometimes come

back and decide that they want to do something else.” Tania believes in respecting their choices and ensures that all the children feel comfortable enough to tell her when they would like to do something different.

As we watched the videotape, Tania draws my attention to an example of the children’s flexibility and choices in the learning environment. We saw H choosing his activities in order of first (blocks), second (art center), third (woodworking). As he wandered over to the art table, he watched some of his friends playing with the dinosaurs in the sand. He then looked back at the planning board and walked over to Tania. He explained to her that he would rather go to the sand box, first, and she explained, “...Sometimes they’ll come back and say ‘well I really wanted to go to the sandbox’ and you know I mean. It’s uh, well I don’t believe in saying ‘well you chose this and you can’t do that you know.’ Yeah, cause everyone changes their mind, and it’s okay to change your mind.” H walked up to the planning board, and changed his first choice to sand and then quickly scooted over to where his friends were playing in the sand.

Variety and flexibility of materials. She also believes that another important element in the learning environment is providing “for a variety of open-ended and child-teacher initiated materials and activities.” She explains:

Well I try to give variety in what I open and what I close. Uh, you know to help develop their ideas, because if it’s always blocks, you know, their block structures get less complex and always the same ideas. That’s how I choose activities so that they can expand on their ideas what they might do with the big blocks, small blocks at the table, connectors, and using different materials. That’s sort of how I choose activities. I just like to give them a variety of experiences, like art. I try to just leave it very open ended I don’t try to give specific ‘okay you

have a face and you have two eyes a nose and a mouth.' I try to put things there and let them explore what they want to do with it.

Tania believes that one cannot force the children to engage in group play or any other type of play, "But with the activities, they're not all necessarily large group activities. They are not necessarily forced to play with a group of children, they can have their own space. Sometimes children need their own space. So I try to accommodate them as it, as it goes." Tania has observed the children engaged in various types of play throughout the day; "...sometimes the children are playing parallel to their friends during an art activity, while later on that day, they may be engaged in group play at the block center."

Tania believes that the learning environment must allow for flexibility, thus allowing the children to bring materials from one area of the classroom to the next. She shared, "I let things go from center to center, like not necessarily because it's a book corner that nothing but books can be in it. I, I let them bring things in there and it actually kind of helps with the language because they bring books into their play, they read each other stories." Tania believes in "...encouraging children to follow their interests and seek answers to their questions, as this lets them discover and learn through their play." By not imposing rules on how materials can be used, "...this allows them to develop more complex forms of play." She continued:

I think their ideas become more complex. That's why I have blocks and dramatic always put together, cause I think those two blend so well together. And why not bring blocks to the book corner? Like that's actually a great way for them to learn language and use books and read stories and you know. I think when there are restrictions it restricts them from learning. It hinders the rest.

As we continued to talk about placing restrictions on the children's play, Tania brought up the number of children per center or per activity. She believes in avoiding the

imposition of unnecessary rules on the number of children per area, because she likes to give them this opportunity to negotiate on their own. She explained, "It's easy for me to say 'okay we're only allowed four people.' But it doesn't give them the opportunity to share ideas, negotiate and mix ideas together, and to build off each other. It's a good way to build social skills." Tania draws my attention to an example that supports her beliefs about creating a learning environment that allows for creativity and flexibility among the children. In this excerpt Tania had set out an exploratory activity with scrap pieces of bubble wrap, aluminum foil, wooden beads, and a variety of materials to paint with such as spoons, spatulas, sponges, and paint brushes. At the art table, four chairs were set up, and as the children approached, they each took a chair and claimed their spot. A fifth child arrived, and asked the group if she could paint too. The children all looked at each other, then at the table, and finally one child said, "yes, you can sit here beside me," and she slid over to the left, and made room for this child. Another boy at the table grabbed a chair for this peer, and then they all started to paint the various materials. Tania believes this example shows how important it is to be flexible with the materials, rules and curriculum in the classroom. She believes that in this excerpt the set up of the environment gave the children the opportunity to solve social problems on their own since it helps develop their sense of self, respect for their peers, negotiation skills, as well as prosocial and language skills. Further, the environment was set up in a way that enabled the children to make more space at the table by adding a chair. Tania's beliefs about the number of children per area can be summed up:

Even painting, we might set it up for four people, but hey if you think you can fit a fifth person at the table then go ahead. If you can figure that one out you can do it. Even like at the sandbox. You know, it's a small sandbox, but if you can fit six people why not. If everyone is happy and you've worked it out, you know.

Tania believes that in her experience, when one places limits, often the same three children always want to be together and tend not to play with other children, therefore limiting their social skills and their circle of friends. She believes that the environment needs to be set up in flexible ways so that the children can actively participate in re-arranging areas as needed.

Learning areas and space. Tania believes that the classroom set up is crucial to ensure optimal play development. As part of this belief she ensures that there are a variety of learning areas present in the classroom. She explains:

We have the block center, actually, I have my block center and dramatic center put together it's like one big center. Um they have many materials, I have a shelf as you walk in that has materials that they can use. I have small manipulative, legos, like things that can be used at the table or once in a while in our block center and dramatic center.

She also has a puzzle area and art area, where there are recyclable materials and collage materials. There also is a woodworking area in the classroom, with real pieces of wood, and real hammers and nails with protective glasses. This particular area represents Tania's experiences with play as a child as she used to work alongside her grandfather as a child using real life tools under close supervision.

Tania believes in maximizing the space the children have in the room to play safely. She spends time each year making sure that the traffic patterns between the learning areas are conducive to the children's play:

...if we have too much space, then the children will start running around and could hurt themselves or others. However, if they don't have enough space this can be dangerous as well. Materials need to be accessible to the children, at their

level and appealing to them. Children need to be encouraged to use the materials in ways that may not have been necessarily intended.

Tania shared an example from the videotaped classroom processes where seven children in the block area made a house out of the tables. Some tables were on the floor and others were stacked on top of the first layer. The children were able to use the space as they saw fit, thus some children were under the tables and others were on top of the tables. Of course safety is her number one concern; however, she believes that taking risks is also an important part of play. According to Tania, "...children need to take calculated risks and consider the pros and cons before they make choices." Tania gives the children this opportunity in her classroom to take risks within safe boundaries.

Freedom of choice. Tania believes another important element in the learning environment is freedom of choice. She believes that "the children should be free to engage in play as they see fit and follow their interests within that environment." She explains that this year she has many girls in her classroom, who are interested in princesses. She stated, "I think that they should be allowed to play at what their realities are. Like I had a lot of boys last year and they liked superheroes. I'm not going to stop them from, from using materials to play out their ideas." Tania encouraged these boys to play out their different roles and take on different personas as they pretended to be Spiderman, Batman and various other characters. She also believes in allowing the children to bring in materials from home. Tania believes that "in order to extend the children's play, you must be aware of their current level of understanding," and therefore what strategies a teacher can use to develop them. Since the children in Tania's class are really interested in building castles, this is one area in her room that she wants to adapt by bringing in more blocks. She explained that if she had more blocks, with different shapes that this would really help promote the children's imaginative and creative skills.

Impact of Professional Training on Beliefs

As Tania expressed her thoughts on her 1-year-intensive Attestation program, she explained that her beliefs on play did not really change as a result of the program. However, she stated, "I think they just became more related to theory. You know, things that I thought before. Well, if you didn't really look into who kind of studied play, well, you know I think they just kind of meshed into various philosophers, like Piaget and Vygotsky." Tania believes that her training served more as a way to validate her own theories and beliefs on play than in providing new ideas.

Theories and child development. Tania believes that her training helped her "understand the importance of developmental milestones" and giving the children space to reach those milestones at their own pace. She expanded, "You know, each child should be ready, not pushing them. There's the teachable moment. You know, those one-on-one times with the children, are kind of the best. They play throughout the day, but their learning throughout the day." She remembers learning about certain influential people in her training and she believes that these people helped refine her play beliefs. Tania shared her memories of learning about Howard Gardner's ideas in her training:

...there are other theories. I don't know if it's necessarily play, but, he's more of a philosopher, like Gardner. Multiple intelligences. Everyone learns in different ways. I think that kind of plays, even if it's not like a direct theory on play, I think it has a lot related to play.

As Tania mentioned earlier, Tania believes it is important to be aware of each child's developmental needs and also to understand that each child will also learn differently. Therefore, Tania believes that part of this understanding can be attributed to her own training in ECE as she was introduced to people like Gardner.

Play course. Tania explained that her program (Attestation in ECE) did not offer a specific course related to play, but she learned about play in a variety of courses. She remembered, "...learning a great deal about development and looking at different stages of development and play in many classes." Tania believes that many of her courses helped her in making links between play and children's overall development. She spoke specifically about her observation course, where she was taught how to make links between the theory covered and her practice. Tania attended many activities classes, where she was expected to plan different activities for various age groups. Tania explained, "and even during the activities class, like we used to have, like play. We used to go to the gym and art class. So it {refers to play} was kind of implemented into our classes." Tania believes that these courses helpful in clarifying for her how to observe children and understand what materials to set out to promote and extend play.

As well, Tania recalled taking a course promoting the children's autonomy and being exposed to a wide range of philosophies related to the topic, particularly "you know, especially with the needs of toddlers." She learned how, as an educator, she could promote autonomy through the children's play and daily activities. As Tania reflected on her training, she continued to tell me that she believes that her training did not really change her ideas, "I just haven't really changed, I just evolved." Tania believes that "...my life experiences, coupled with my training, have helped define who I am and what my beliefs are today." Tania seems to be cognizant of the fact that her training did help inform her current beliefs about play as well as her practices.

Chapter IX : Cross Case Analysis and Discussion

During the within-case analysis, I had the opportunity to describe each case in full, focusing on the specific beliefs that emerged, as I dialogued with individual educators and observed them in practice. The categories that emerged from the interviews, observations and the IPR process focused primarily on the following categories: educators' memories about play; educators' beliefs about play; educators' beliefs about the role of the educator and the environment in play; educator beliefs about the role of training in play; and challenges to implementation of play.

In the following section, I will present a cross-case analysis and discussion of the similarities and differences that have emerged, while interacting with all four educators. The findings will be presented as follows: (1) 'oh the memories', (2) 'I am therefore I believe'; (3) 'impact of educator'; (4) 'relaxed environment'; (5) 'training' and (6) challenges faced by parents. A specific focus will be related to the theoretical framework of teacher beliefs, as well as a relation to extant literature (as demonstrated in the literature review). In relation to the findings, the research questions will be discussed throughout the various sections: (1) What are the educators' play beliefs, (2) how do they practice play, and (3) how do they incorporate both theoretical and practical components of play beliefs into the ECE classroom.

Oh the Memories

One of the major findings apparent across all cases was the impact of childhood memories and experiences, on the educator's development of play beliefs. An important part of the teacher beliefs framework is the role of pre-service experiences in the development of educators' beliefs (Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999). Interestingly, each educator attributed their development of play beliefs and attitudes, in part, to their own play experiences as children and in early adulthood. Furthermore, as part of the framework,

establishing core beliefs (Haney & McArthur, 2001) are typically linked to long-term beliefs (childhood memories, and previous experiences growing up) that impact an educators' transfer of beliefs into practice (Charlesworth et al., 1991). The educators' pre-service beliefs about play will be discussed in the following section.

My upbringing. All four women shared with me that their childhood memories and early experiences prior to training impacted who they are today and how they implement play in their current classrooms. The lived experiences that they had growing up with their families in tight knit communities influenced their beliefs and values Adrienne clearly remembered “we used to travel all around the world and I remember visiting people from different countries and learning about different people, foods they ate, and manners.” She says that even today she wants to ensure that she reflects this openness in her own classroom. Milena recollects her childhood memories as being “very positive memories of family gatherings, playing with her grandparents using materials found around the house to extend the play.” Another example of how precious these early memories were for these educators was the life lessons involved as Ellen explains “I remember my aunts and grandparents telling me about manners and how to respect other people”. Tania also seems to attribute her personal beliefs about play to her own memories and early experiences as a child. She spoke particularly about “growing up in the country house living with my parents and grandparents was really rewarding, I learned so much from them”. This finding seems to reflect what Joram and Gabriele (1998) and Kagan (1992) advance in that educators' own life experiences, such as memories of play as a child, culture, values, upbringing seem to influence their personal beliefs about play. It is clear that these educators' beliefs about play can in part be attributed to these early experiences.

Staying at home. All participants grew up in the same generation raised by family members, learning about culture and the world around them from their parents' and families'

perspectives. All four educators explained in their cases that they did not attend any formal daycare setting prior to kindergarten; Adrienne shared this comment “I didn’t attend any formal daycare, it was me and my family.” Adrienne learned many of life’s lessons from her family and from early experiences. In fact, this was the case for each educator as they shared their memories of growing up with their families: Ellen explains “I remember playing at home with my aunt in the kitchen, taking out pots and pans as she would cook.” Milena adds her own spice “I used to make all sorts of things in the kitchen with my Nona....in fact I didn’t go to school until kindergarten,” and Tania remembered a very similar childhood “I used to play in the kitchen with my sister and I remember using the old black pots and the wooden spoon to play.” These memories of play and the people involved in the educators’ upbringing were important elements in the evolution of their beliefs. As described by Joram and Gabriele (1998) and Kagan (1992) these early lived experiences seem to play a very important role in establishing beliefs about play. These educators learned important life lessons from their own families through cultural and family oriented experiences. Understanding these early experiences helps to inform educator trainers when they try and introduce new concepts and ideas to the educators. These pre-service beliefs play an important role in how the educators will filter new knowledge into their already existing beliefs.

The great outdoors. An apparent sub-theme which emerged across all four cases was the influence early experiences in the great outdoors had on the educators. From dialoguing with all four educators, one thing that became very apparent was the educators’ memories of ‘the great outdoors.’ Each educator spoke about playing in the ‘great outdoors’ with their family members and neighbours. In fact, they all seemed to attribute these outdoor experiences and childhood memories to the development of their play beliefs.

As a child Adrienne remembers spending countless hours outdoors exploring nature, playing in the woods, in her backyard, at parks all over the world, as well as the beach. Adrienne shares this vivid memory here “We were always outside and travelling places. There was a lot of going to the park. We were in all these different countries; so like playing at the beach, playing in the mountains, playing in someone else’s backyard.” Similarly, Ellen’s personal upbringing, as well as her own childhood play memories seem to have forged a lasting impression and have to some extent affected her own beliefs about play. Ellen shared that as a child she was encouraged “to explore the world” around her, and explore nature. She recollects here “we used to do a lot of outdoor games, running in the fields, chasing each other and butterflies.” Interestingly, Milena also shared in her fond memories of the outdoors. She recollects playing with her family and the neighbors in the woods and in the yard, “exploring nature, twigs, and insects, everything around.” In fact, she spoke about “running outside, catching butterflies, collecting stones, and playing dress-up.” She remembered “lots of hands-on activities” in her play as she “created different potions in the back yard with household ingredients such as flour, baking soda, vinegar, and food coloring.” As Tania shared her fondest outdoor play memories, she recollected the outdoor games she used to play with her sister (tag, hide and seek, house). She also shared the memory of “making toys from household materials or things we had found outdoors such as twigs, pebbles, bark.” In sum, Tania recollects a fond memory “the great outdoors is where I remember spending most of my time, especially with my grandfather.”

Findings here can be related to Sandberg and Samuleson’s (2003) research in which the participants noted the great outdoors as an important element in their childhood play memories. The four educators shared in the relevance and value of play in the great outdoors and reflected the desire to emulate these memories in their own classrooms today. This suggests that early experiences and memories are important factors to consider when

investigating educators' beliefs about play and may in fact be considered as part of the educators' core beliefs about play (Haney & McArthur, 2001). It is evident that for these educators their beliefs about play can certainly be in part related to the great outdoors.

Core beliefs. In their case studies, each of the educators shared their positive play experiences as children. They recalled engaging in play that included outdoor experiences, hands-on learning and imaginative play. These experiences appear to have played an important role in defining their 'core' beliefs, which are the generalized beliefs that they entered their training program with. As they learned about their heritage and culture through social interactions with family, friends and neighbours they began to develop their own beliefs about who they were and what play meant to them (Haney & McArthur, 2001). This finding in general seems to reflect the relevance of what Salisbury-Glennon and Stevens (1999) and Anderson et al. (1995) have described as 'personal history based beliefs' or 'pre-service experiences' which have been developed in part by the educators' own life experiences, memories of childhood play, culture, upbringing, and personal experiences with play. These early personal history based experiences seemed to have played an important role in establishing each of the educators' development of play beliefs. Their training also played an important role in developing and reinforcing their core beliefs, this will be discussed in the section under training.

As the educators described their memories of growing up with extended family, exploring the outdoors, and travelling with family, they expressed their own early experiences with play, which fits with Shulman (1986), who described how an educator's beliefs and values tend to be not only gained through training, but also through childhood experiences. These key experiences impacted the educators' own beliefs and how they teach today.

These positive early experiences seem to have contributed to what Haney and McArthur (2001) call “core beliefs.” According to Haney and McArthur (2001) “core beliefs” are the beliefs that the educators have established through their early lived experiences and have become an important part of their current beliefs.

Adrienne learned as a child that the learning environment does not only encompass the classroom, but the surrounding world as well. In her classroom today she tries to encourage extending the indoor classroom to the outdoor environment as well, acting as an expression of her own core beliefs. She explains this notion here “...I want my kids now, in the classroom, but in the future my own kids, as well, to have the same experiences I did. And it’s always a learning opportunity, and it should be outside as much as possible.” Here we see an important link between a core belief for Adrienne, the relevance of outdoor play, and her classroom practice (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003). This core belief developed through a combination of Adrienne’s early experiences and childhood play memories. An example of this core belief being realized in practice can be observed in the videotaped classroom processes where Adrienne takes the children outside for a nature walk. As she leads her group of children along a path near the daycare she asks them to use their senses in order to appreciate the world around them. She asks them to look for different types of trees and leaves, to listen for the different sounds they hear, pay attention to the odours they smell, and to pick up little souvenirs along the way. When they return to the daycare Adrienne asks all the children to examine the treasures they have found and to share what they have seen, heard, felt and smelt during their walk. This is an example of bringing nature and the great outdoors to life through her play activities.

Similarly, Ellen posits that her positive experiences playing in the great outdoors have reinforced her play beliefs as an educator: “I still want the children to play outside

as I did, through lots of hands-on activities.” Here again there seems to be a particular link between Haney and McArthur’s (2001) ‘core beliefs.’ Ellen’s early experiences seem to have contributed to core beliefs about play and these experiences have maintained their level of importance for her today as an early childhood educator. Ellen explains that her early experiences (childhood games) have contributed to her beliefs about play and as a result reflect what she does now in her own classroom (Sandberg & Samuelson, 2003). Much as the literature suggests, these pre-service experiences influence educators’ beliefs, which often solidify over time and through experience (Richards & Lockheart, 1994). An illustration of this belief being realized in practice (praxis) can be viewed in the videotaped classroom processes where Adrienne takes her group outdoors to play in the snow. As the sun is shining brightly on this cold morning one child notices water dripping off of an icicle clinging from the toy shed. This child exclaims, “Ellen, look, look water is falling from the snow.” Ellen takes this opportunity to talk about the sun’s temperature and how the ice is melting because the sun is warm. As the child looks at Ellen in a perplexed fashion she suggests bringing the icicle indoors and observing what happens. The child smiles and becomes very excited with this idea as he gathers buckets of snow to take in and explore. This is an example of how Ellen uses the great outdoors as a powerful play experience for the children in her classroom.

Even for Milena, these pre-service experiences and childhood memories seemed to have had lasting effects on the development of her own play beliefs and values and may have contributed to her core beliefs on the value of play (Brownlee et al., 2011; Haney & McArthur, 2001). Hence, Milena’s own history, culture and upbringing seemed to have played an important role in the development of her beliefs about play and how they later were translated into practice (Haney & McArthur, 2001; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Smith, 2005). During snack time I was able to observe her play

beliefs being reflected in her classroom practice. The snow started to fall and the children began to gravitate towards the window to watch the big, white, fluffy flakes hit the ground. One child asked Milena where the snow was going when it hit the ground? Milena began to explain that the best way to understand what happens when the snow touches the ground is to go outside and experience this for themselves. The children's eyes lit up as they got dressed and headed to the yard. Once outside Milena encouraged the children to catch snowflakes on their mittens, in pails, and on bare hands. This led into a discussion on temperature, liquids and solids as the children explored the beauty of the snowflakes for over a half hour.

Milena was also able to identify her early pre-service experiences as playing an important role in the development of her own play beliefs (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992). She attributed this to positive memories of play in her childhood and support from her family in her upbringing. Tania also remembered, "...playing outside in the summer until it was dark and my mother would call my sister and I to come in and get ready for bed." She added that she "used to have so much fun playing with the outdoor natural elements." She believes that having had these important memories of playing outdoors with her sibling and her family have influenced her ideas about the relevance of play, especially outdoor play, for her in her own classroom today. This finding seems to suggest the relevance of what Salisbury-Glennon and Stevens (1999) indicate in the role of 'personal history based beliefs'. For Tania, these experiences are reflected in her current beliefs about play. An example of this belief being realized in practice can be reflected in the videotaped classroom processes. One child in her classroom arrived at snack time holding a red maple leaf. He showed all his friends and started to tell Tania that the leaf had fallen to the ground because now the snow was coming. Tania asked him how he knew this and he said, "my daddy told me." The other

children started to ask many questions about why leaves fell from the trees, why some were green, yellow, red, and orange? Tania looked at the children and grinned and then started to tell them about her own experiences collecting leaves as a child with her grandfather. She then asked all the children to get their coats and head outdoors to go on a "leaf hunt." She took them for a 45-minute walk on campus where they observed all different types of trees and leaves and brought back dead leaves to examine in the classroom. This was a reflection of the relevance of the outdoor environment for Tania, much as what the participants referred to in Sandberg and Samuelson's (2003) research.

For all four educators there is an important connection to be made between their early experiences, social interactions between their family members and their own beliefs about play (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Richards & Lockheart, 1994). Much as Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens (1999) suggest that 'personal history based beliefs' have an impact on individual's core beliefs, this appears to be the case for these educators. Each of the educators' play beliefs appeared to be established prior to their training in ECE, an observation grounded in their reflections: "My beliefs didn't change after my training, they were just reinforced," (Adrienne), "I already believed that play was important, so I don't think my training changed this" (Ellen), "My training didn't alter my beliefs about play, I guess they just were solidified" (Milena), "My training didn't change what I thought already about play, that was there before I did my program". These comments strongly reinforce the notion that pre-service experiences play an important role in understanding the development of beliefs and help us understand what these educators' play beliefs are (Sanger & Ogusthorpe, 2011).

In the following section I will discuss another important finding that emerged across all four cases; the fact that each educator was able to reflect on their play beliefs and articulate them during the interviews. The title for this section came from the transcripts as

the educators described in their own words their experiences with play and how these experiences made them who they are today.

I Am, Therefore I Believe

An important finding in this research was that all four educators were able to articulate their own beliefs about play. The educators insisted that their play beliefs were already in place prior to their training and in fact, their training only helped to broaden their beliefs and give them more ideas. Adrienne explained, “I learned a lot about play as a child, the things I used to do, the things I remembered. My training helped me like learn new ways, new things to present to the kids, but didn’t change my beliefs.” This seemed to hold true also for Ellen, who said “I really think my beliefs haven’t changed because of my training. Everything I believe and I do was there before, the training just helped give me new ideas.” She described some of these new ideas as teaching children how to join in cooperative play and how to use hands-on materials to stimulate development. Milena also expressed a similar view: “I haven’t changed, everything I believe about play is the same. I try and reinforce what I did as a child in my own class”. She shares an example of learning about nature by going out on nature walks learning about different types of trees, animals and insects. And finally Tania shares her view “I don’t think my beliefs have changed, I think they have solidified. I still believe everything I did before, just now I can give names to it.” She explained that now she can actually explain what stage of cognitive development that the children are in and what types of play they are engaging in (i.e., onlooker, solitary, parallel, associative, cooperative).

This is an important finding considering that research suggests that some educators are unable to articulate their own beliefs, hence making it difficult to actually translate these beliefs into practice (Cooney, 1985; Pajares, 1992; Thomson, 1984). Although each educator may not have held the same beliefs about play, they certainly had ‘core’ beliefs about play

that seemed to impact what they did in the classroom. These core beliefs only seemed to be reinforced through experience, suggesting that the educators in fact were able to state their beliefs and reinforce them in the classroom.

In the following section I will highlight the similarities between the educators' reported beliefs, as well as the differences. An important finding in this research that seemed apparent across the majority of the cases was the pleasure factor associated with the educators' play beliefs.

Pleasure factor. Three of the educators share in the belief that play needs to be fun and pleasurable for the child. Adrienne's early experiences with play were pleasurable for her and therefore, had an important impact on her own beliefs about play. She explains, "play is something that needs to be pleasurable, it is within the child. It is not something that the child is forced to do." Milena also believes that play needs to be fun and pleasurable for the children. She describes this, "automatically I think of play it's got to be fun, it just has to be fun." Milena explains that her own experiences with play were always pleasurable as a child and this is what she wants to reflect in her own classroom. Tania believes that there is a pleasure factor associated with play, and if the children are not having fun and enjoying themselves, then it is not play. She states here "that play should be fun and pleasurable." Here we see a connection between these educators' own early experiences with play and the transfer of these experiences to their current beliefs. The fact that they recall their own play experiences as pleasant seems to have impacted their current beliefs about play and have followed them into their own classrooms. Here we see a connection between the research literature suggesting that there is a pleasurable quality to play (Johnson, 1998).

Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go. An interesting finding emerged among three of the educators suggesting that play is very different from work. It is important to note that the same three educators who believe that play must be fun and pleasurable as noted above, are

the ones that believe there is a difference between work and play. This seems to be an important distinction for these educators, and in fact may be related to their own experiences growing up as children. It is also possible that the distinction between work and play could be influenced by their post-service experiences, as many of the early childhood textbooks distinguish between work and play (see Hughes, 1999).

Adrienne explained that play needs to be fun, whereas work is something forced on the child from external pressures. She adds more here “play can have many meanings, but it is when children are engaged and having fun, that they are going to learn much better than if they feel the pressure to.” She continues, “if children do not enjoy what they are doing, it ceases to be play,” and therefore becomes work. Milena also shares a similar belief about the distinction between work and play. She believes that play must be self-directed and intrinsically motivated (coming from the child). She clarifies “...play needs to be self-directed and is not forced upon the child, it must be intrinsically motivating.” Both educators suggest that if the activity is forced upon the child then it is no longer play, and “it becomes work instead” (Adrienne). Milena spoke about this play/work divide in her own classroom explaining “...that play took place once the work was done (e.g., daily tasks such as bathroom, hand washing, routines).” This reinforces the belief that if work (or chores) is forced upon the child then it no longer can be considered play because play should be fun and intrinsically motivating.

During my time in Milena’s classroom I observed the children involved in the completion of daily tasks such as putting shoes on, putting cups away before they could engage in free play. However, these daily tasks were common in all four classrooms as the children all had certain responsibilities within the classrooms to complete (i.e., putting away shoes, boots, etc.). This divide is also something that often appears in the research literature (Elkind, 2001; Montessori, 1964; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Perhaps in Milena’s case this

play/work divide may reflect her own lived experiences with play or may in fact be influenced by her learning in her ECE training (Sanger & Ogusthorpe, 2011).

Tania believes “if the children are not completely wrapped up in the experience or if it is not pleasurable for them, then it ceases to be play.” Again we see a distinction between work as something that is forced on the child, and play as being something that the child is motivated to do and enjoys doing. This distinction can also be reflected in the literature as Rubin et al., (1983) and Garvey (1977) describe play as being intrinsically motivating. Tania gives an example “for me I had to take piano lessons as a child. This was not fun, it was work.” In both cases I was able to observe the examples of the intrinsic nature of play in the classroom, as the children were free to choose and direct their play activities. In Milena’s classroom she would set out materials and let the children choose what they wanted to do with the beads and pipe cleaners, it came from the child. The same observation was true for Tania as I observed the children pursuing their interests from sawing away on the tree trunk or lacing the wooden shoes, the children were free to follow their desires.

There is an interesting concept that often surfaces in the literature surrounding play, which defines play as the “antithesis of work and seriousness” (Reifel, 1999, p.202). In their seminal chapter on play, Rubin et al., (1983) state that pleasure is one of the defining features of play, along with the characteristic of being intrinsically motivating. In Nourrot (1998), pleasure is also defined as one of the key characteristics of play. Hence, work is generally identified by educators as the things children do that may not be considered pleasurable, such as daily tasks and chores. Another definition of work in the literature characterizes it as “serious, literal, and motivated extrinsically” activity (Reifel, 1999, p. 699). The educators in this study seemed to have very clear beliefs about what play and work is. Tania clearly articulated the difference this way: “children’s play is fun and self-directed; work is the things we have to do and is not related to pleasure.” Milena

also seemed to have a clear assumption about the difference as she expected the children to do their work first and then they could play. She believed that their work was doing “daily tasks such as bathroom, hand washing, routines.” It may be that these distinctions between work and play are a result of their own early experiences and memories of play and work as children. However, it is also possible that their ECE training may also have impacted the distinction between these two definitions. The text books used in the training programs may also have an influence on the binary definition of work and play. Despite the dichotomous distinctions found in the literature and shared by participants in this study, it is worth pointing out that for many, work can be experienced as “fun”, and play can be characterized as “boring”.

An important element in the work/play divide that has been noted in the research is the amount of time allotted for play throughout the day (Stegelin, 2005; Stipek & Byler, 1997). For some educators, play is seen as a reward given to children once they have completed all prescribed tasks (Stegelin, 2005). The educators in this study did not grant play as a reward. However, Milena did make a clear distinction between the periods of work (being the scheduled routines of the day such as putting coats and boots away) and play and stated that her children knew that they could play once their work was done. She reflected this belief while reviewing a video of the children coming indoors, they knew that their work entailed putting their coats and boots away, and once this ‘work’ was complete they could choose their play areas. Milena reflected on her training and shared with me that in her Play course she learnt the difference between work and play. In fact, she had to observe the children on a video tape and describe the types of play she was seeing and when the play stopped she needed to describe this and explain the work the children were doing. It is quite possible that her post-service experiences, especially her training in ECE, impacted her beliefs about a play/work divide. She clearly believes

that work (routines) has a defined period in the day, and the work must be complete before the children can play. This is in line with Erikson and Schultz (1981) and McCarthy et al. (2001) suggesting that educational training can provide students with appropriate information and knowledge about play. It is possible that her post-service experiences have enabled her to filter new knowledge and may have influenced her current beliefs and practice.

Hands-on learning. An important finding that emerged across all cases was the hands-on learning and exploration that comes through play experiences, both indoors and out. The educators indicated that children learn best through active, hands-on stimulation of their environment. According to certain theorists it is difficult for many educators to reflect on what they have learned in their lived experiences and in training and to later reflect this in their classroom practice (Michelet, 1986; Roskos & Christie, 2002). The educators in this study seemed capable of reflecting on their current beliefs (developed over the course of both their pre-service and post-service experiences), as they translated them into classroom practice (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). There may be a link here between Charlesworth and her colleagues (1991) findings suggesting that extreme beliefs can impact the belief-action relationship.

Adrienne explains this belief in saying “even though they just may be putting something in a bucket and taking it out again, and putting it in and taking it out again, this is the real thing that hands-on learning in play.” For Adrienne, “it’s that hands-on learning about cause and effect that makes it all worth while.” Ellen also shares this notion: “as they are busy playing they have the opportunity to discover how the world and the materials within that world function.” Ellen believes it is very important for the children to get immersed in what they are doing: “put their hands in that shaving cream, get it all over their elbows as they are discovering the texture.” She explains further they

learn "...about specific likes and dislikes and learn how to master new skills; they get to take on new personas, and explore the world around them."

Milena also shares in the belief that play is about active hands-on learning. For example, she talks about the importance of the children playing with "something that is tactile, it's hands on. I think throughout that play they're working to get experience and all that stuff." She believes that "learning goes hand-in-hand with play and the two cannot be separated from each other." She observes that as the children are busy observing the melting snow they are able to touch the snow and feel how cold it is, and then watch how it transforms into water or a liquid. She explains "this stuff is great, to see them understanding different temperatures and how they can change things from a solid to a liquid and then back again." Tania also shares in this belief and states that "one cannot separate learning from play, because as the children are busy exploring new textures, different materials; they are in fact learning new information." Tania believes that play needs to be hands-on. Children cannot be filled like little sponges with information passively "they need to be doing it, whatever it is, touching the play dough, mixing the flour and the yeast. This is what play is all about."

As the educators shared their own beliefs about play they also reflected on their practice in the classroom. I in turn, was able to observe just how they incorporated the hands-on approach in practice (praxis) in the videotapes, reflecting how they practice play. Each educator wanted to share how their beliefs got translated into the classroom through the set up of the room, the materials within that room, and the activities they chose. In the following section I will present examples of hands-on learning through play.

Adrienne was able to reflect her belief in the relevance of hands-on learning in the classroom practice as she spoke specifically about an activity she had set out for the children with shaving cream. She described each step as R plunged his hands into the shaving cream

and said, “look it makes yellow, it’s like a yellow light!” Adrienne affirmed that in this activity R was “...demonstrating exploration and discovery through his meaning making and through hands-on exploration,” affirming her belief that play is all about the hands-on experience. This activity was important because she felt that it really allowed this child to discover through hands-on experiences in his play.

Adrienne shared another example of how the children can learn about different roles and professions through hands-on exploration in the classroom. In this episode child R walked over to the construction site in the classroom, picked up a red hat and placed it on his head. R then picked up the red tool kit with his left hand and walked backwards towards Adrienne who was sitting at the table. R said to Adrienne “I am going to work.” In watching this sequence, Adrienne described this as an example of hands-on learning at its best because child R was able to explore the role of a construction worker through active hands-on experience. She believes that this play scenario demonstrated his learning of adult roles and specific careers—a “construction worker” in this case.

Ellen believes that children learn best through active participation with their environment, they “need to touch, feel, explore with the materials in their own way to make sense of it.” Ellen drew a link between her play beliefs and an activity that she set out in the classroom for the children linking her espoused beliefs with practice. She explained that this was an example of the hands-on learning that goes on in her class. In this example child H was busy playing in the dramatic area wearing an apron and he slid an oven mitt over his left hand. He glanced over his right shoulder and called towards one of his peers “come, supper is ready.” He then pulled open the oven door using both hands and gently pulled out a tray with a green bowl in the center. He balanced the tray carefully so as not to drop the bowl on the floor. He placed the tray on the top of the counter and then told the child to sit down. The peer approached the tray and grabbed the bowl with two hands. His eyes became very tiny

and he said in a deep voice, "I told you not to touch the oven. You will burn your hands."

Ellen explains to me that this is what she means when she says that children discover through hands-on experiences with play.

Milena shares her thoughts about the importance of hands-on exploration in the learning environment as an important belief. An activity that I observed in the classroom where she was able to identify the link between her espoused beliefs and her was making chocolate chips muffins in her group. Eight children are sitting at the table waiting for their turn to make muffins from scratch. They each have their own bowl and they get a turn to pour the flour in, the milk, chocolate chips, and bananas. She explained how this activity promotes their learning: "they're learning...to wait their turn, learning how to stir and mix ingredients, how to follow a recipe...". Milena says the "children are learning about temperature and time as they have to wait for the muffins to cook in the oven before they can eat them." This serves as an example of the relevance of providing children with opportunities to explore using their senses in a hands-on activity.

During my observations I witnessed first hand how Tania's espoused beliefs about hands-on experiences are reflected in her practice. Tania had explained to me earlier in the morning that some of the children had shared an interest in cutting different shapes, while others were struggling with how to manipulate the scissors. She decided to set out an activity with serrated edge scissors to allow the children to explore through active participation. On the videotape there were four children who were sitting at the art table, each with a pair of scissors cutting various materials as they made a collage. Child M asked her friend if she could pass the green zigzag scissors, so she could make designs on her card. Child S placed her scissors down, sifted through the bin of scissors, and gently picked up the pink scissors and handed it to M. M said 'thank you' and continued to talk to the other children at the table. Child M then tried to figure out how to place her forefinger and thumb in the right hole for

approximately five minutes until she got it and smiled. Tania explained, “this was a great way for the children to develop their skills through hands-on exploration.” She believes that the children in her classroom are learning and exploring through the activities she sets out.

Impact of Training on Educator

Although the four educators claim that their beliefs about the importance of play stemmed from early experiences with play as children, they did share that their training played an important role in reinforcing their beliefs and helping them learn how to assist the children in their play. This is an aspect that is important to discuss in this study because the training seemed to influence the educators general beliefs about play and help them consolidate the beliefs in practice. Despite the different training programs—the Attestation and the DEC in ECE—all four educators said that their training reinforced their beliefs about play. Ellen and Milena completed the DEC (3 year program in ECE which comprised a Play and Development course), while Adrienne and Tania completed the Attestation in ECE (with no specific Play course). They all claim that many of their beliefs about play and their role in developing play experiences in the classroom were enriched through their training in ECE. This finding reflects Kagan’s (1992) research that both pre-service and post-service experience can facilitate learning that is congruent with existing knowledge. For these educators their previous experiences with play served as a foundation for their developing beliefs. Therefore, as they entered their training programs the strength of their existing beliefs or their ‘core beliefs’ was reflected in the choices they made.

In the following section, I will draw on both the similarities and differences between the educators’ beliefs as affected by their training.

A key concept that emerged in the cases was the importance of being reflective of every aspect of the day. Although the educators expressed this in different ways, they all reflected on the way they positioned themselves relative to the children in their play. The

educators all felt that it was very important that they acted primarily as good role models for the children, that they engaged in daily observations of the children's play, and that they helped scaffold the children in their play when necessary. In the following section I will share with you the educators' beliefs about their roles in the play.

Role model. Two of the educators, Adrienne and Milena spoke specifically about their belief that they needed to act as role models in the play. Adrienne explains this belief "I am a role model for the children, they watch me and learn from my actions." Considering the latter, Adrienne feels that it is important to model positive approaches to play in the classroom, as her response towards joining in the play can affect the children's demeanour and level of participation. I observed this belief in practice as one child asked Adrienne to be a patient in the doctor's corner. She joined in the play and modelled appropriate social play until one child said, "okay, you can go now. We have the next patient," and then Adrienne moved out of the play sequence. In observing this moment, Adrienne explained to me that she was able to read the cues from the children, and step back, giving them the space to lead the play scenario further. In this example she was able to reflect her beliefs about joining in the play in her own practice. This is an important element in transferring beliefs into practice and suggests that she is able to bridge the apparent gap (Michelet, 1986). It is possible that because she already had strong 'core beliefs' (Haney & McArthur, 2001) it was easier for her to adapt her existing beliefs and reflect them into her own classroom practice.

According to Farver and LeesShin (1997) modeling can serve an important role in the classroom, as the educator can influence the children's play behaviour. Adrienne's beliefs seem to be in line with Farver and LeeShin's (1997) research as she models for the children appropriate skills and behaviours to adopt while playing with peers. She

feels that part of modeling entails joining in the children's play to help teach them appropriate skills, such as how to enter play and how to share materials.

Milena believes that "...modeling is extremely important in play, especially for the educators in the classroom." She spoke about modeling not only in the play, but also throughout the day. Milena believes that "...children learn from the adults in their lives, therefore if the adults behave badly the children may imitate this behavior." A large part of the modeling for Milena has to do with respect. According to Farver and Leeshin (1997) the educators' play beliefs and values can in turn affect the types of play behaviors that the children exhibit.

Through the looking glass. One aspect that all four educators were able to transfer into their own practice was the importance of observations during the play. They all shared in their belief about the importance of observing the play and shared how they practiced this belief in the classroom. Each educator spoke specifically about their training programs and the relevance of either their Observing courses or their Play courses in helping them understand this skill. These were skills that they specifically attributed to learning in their training programs and that impacted their beliefs about play. Again, here we see a connection between Kagan's (1992) research suggesting that pre-service and post-service experience can facilitate learning if this learning is congruent with pre-existing knowledge. The educators' previous experiences with play seemed to serve as a foundation for their evolving beliefs. Therefore, as they entered their training programs their core beliefs were already in place and continued to be reinforced throughout their training programs (Haney & McArthur, 2001).

Adrienne spoke about her Observing course, as well as her Activities courses in her Attestation program, in helping her understand how to observe the children's play and what to look for in order to help develop the play. Her beliefs about her role in the

play developed after taking these courses. She learnt the importance of observations in determining what level the children are at, what they like and dislike, and what types of play activities to organize and set out. She states that "it is through observations that I can understand the needs of each child, and help support their overall development."

Adrienne believes that by carefully observing the children she is able to decipher where each child is at developmentally, and then plan for activities to support this development. She spoke about learning how to document the children's development in her training: "we learned how to take notes, anecdotes of the children's play and then use them to interpret what they are learning and able to do." Adrienne felt that this was an extremely useful tool, something she continues to use in her practice. This ability to use her observation skills in order to help promote this child's play was a skill that she developed through her own experience working with children of different ages, but also something she learned through her Attestation program in ECE.

I observed first-hand how Adrienne embodied her espoused beliefs in practice. During my short stay in her classroom I often saw her jotting down notes on yellow post-its of the children's play. For example, one day she shared with me her anecdotes of the children and I saw first-hand how she used these observations to help her plan what she would do next. One day she observed the interest of the group in ice skating and hockey. So she organized for a guest speaker to come into the classroom to talk about playing hockey (a friend of hers). These observations became an important part of her daily routines.

Adrienne seemed to be cognisant of the fact that her Activities courses as well as her Observation course enabled her to learn how to observe the children's play and then respond to what she was seeing, hence her training (post-service experiences) and personal experiences (pre-service) affected her practice. Congruent with Charleworth et

al., (1991) strong beliefs can impact the beliefs-action relationship, hence facilitating the transfer of beliefs into practice. Adrienne seemed to be able to connect her prior experiences working with children with her actual classroom practice, as she translated her knowledge into practice (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It is important to mention that Adrienne's training seemed to introduce a range of specific practices and techniques (i.e., role model in the play, observer in the play and scaffolder) that would not have emerged from childhood experience. In the movement from generalized beliefs (pre-service) to practice, the training provided some useful bridges. Clearly, her training program influenced her understanding of observation and play and this post-service experience played an important role for her beliefs (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

During my time in Adrienne's classroom I was able to observe this espoused belief in practice as she would take time each day to observe the children's play. She would be unobtrusive and would stand back and jot down little anecdotes of what the children were saying and doing. She at times would actually get out her camera and take pictures of the children as they were busy building an ice rink under the table. The anecdotes were an important part of her daily routines.

Ellen also shared in the belief that observation was an important element in understanding the development of the children's play. She spoke specifically about the role of observation and the specifics of what she learned in her training as she observed behind the two-way mirror in both her Observing and Play courses in the 3 year DEC. Ellen claims that developing the ability to be a sensitive observer has taken great patience and effort on her part, and she believes that she continues to develop this skill. Ellen provided an example to reflect her belief "I feel my role is to observe the children. And if I see them getting a bit stressed I try to intervene, so I try and go and put one hand on

their back and say 'what's the problem, what's the problem?' And I let them talk about it and encourage them to say 'I want this toy what can we do? Who can take it first? Are you okay with it?' But then I let them go." She also made reference to learning how to document the children's learning through anecdotal records. She explains, "anecdotes are little examples, written examples of the children's development and really help me see where they are at and where they are going." "I continue to use anecdotal today. This is the best way to share with the parents what their children are doing as they play."

I observed Ellen's use observations in the classroom on different occasions, as she would sit back and record various captions from the children's play including quotes, and snapshots of the play. She would jot down different observations daily on the children and then post them on her bulletin board. At the end of the day she would go back to these observations and add more detail. It is important to mention that her belief in the importance of observing was something that Ellen learned in her training program. She seemed able to take this concept of observing and adapt it into her daily routines helping her understand where the children were in their overall development. Again, reinforcing that her training did in fact introduce a range of specific practices and techniques (i.e., observation of play, anecdote observations of the play) that would not have emerged from childhood experience alone.

Milena also shared how she felt her role as an educator in the play "...was to follow the children's interests," by being a responsive educator. As she carefully observed each child she was able to "...understand their interests, where they liked to play, with what materials, with which children, and then could set up the environment to support these interests." Not only did Milena indicate a belief in the importance of being a responsive educator, she also realized this belief in her classroom by changing the learning environment when needed. For example, one child arrived at daycare with a

pirate book. He asked Milena to read this at circle time and then the other children began to ask questions about where pirates lived, what they ate, how they lived? In response to these observations and questions Milena decided to bring in flags, pirate hats, boots, books to re-design the dramatic area with the children. Milena's training introduced her to a variety of practices and techniques that she was able to adapt into her own pre-existing beliefs about play. Therefore, her training seemed to serve as a useful bridge between theory and practice (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Also, Milena spoke about learning how to document the children's learning through her Observing course where she was introduced to anecdotal records, as did also Adrienne and Ellen. She explained, "I still use these records, or snapshots of what the children are doing today." She explained that her anecdotes "reflect what I see the children doing and show their growth." Despite entering her training with a number of core beliefs about play (established during her pre-service experiences), it is clear that Milena's training contributed additional ideas and practices to her play repertoire.

Tania also reflected on the importance of her training in helping her gain useful skills in helping children develop their play behaviours. She spoke specifically about her Observation course and learning how to "make links between the children's developmental milestones and programming." This is another example of the role of her training (post-service experience) in the development of her beliefs. Tania spoke about skills and techniques that she learned through her Attestation program, namely how to observe, scaffold the children's play, and use anecdotes to develop her knowledge of the children's abilities. Tania believes that observations are key in helping her "set up activities for the children, when to change toys and materials in the classroom, when to scaffold their learning." She also spoke about a specific technique that she learned in her training that she continues to use today "anecdotal records." Just as Milena and Ellen

mentioned above, the use of anecdotal records is something that was specific to all four educators' training programs and something they were able to transfer into their own classroom practice. Tania says anecdotal records "help her make sense of the children's abilities, needs, and interests." As she observes the children in play, she "...takes anecdotal notes of each developmental milestone" to help her gauge the children's needs and also to share with the parents. This is an element that she took from her training and now has adapted into her own practice on a regular basis. I observed this implementation of observations during my time in the classroom. Tania also would observe the children as they played and jot down little observations in her pocket book. She would at times write down direct quotes and other times she would just explain what she saw happening. Later she would transcribe these observations and put them into the child's portfolio.

Documentation. Two of the educators made specific reference to the relevance of documentation learned through their training. Both Tania and Milena reflected specifically on the relevance of their post-service experiences (Haney & McArthur, 2001) in adapting their current beliefs. Although all four educators discussed the relevance of observations in helping them write anecdotes and in guiding the children's play, Tania and Milena referred specifically to the role of focused portfolios.

Tania believes that her training helped her consolidate her own beliefs and approaches in this regard. The use of focused portfolios as a method to document learning is another example of her ability to translate the knowledge gained in her training program and apply it to practice as outlined by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1990). It seems that she was reflecting-on-action as she was able to take what she learned in her classes and then apply this to her own classroom practice. This would suggest that despite some literature that speaks to the contrary, (e.g., DeCorte, 1999; Perkins & Salomon, 1989), it is possible to translate theory learned in one context to another

situation. In Tania's case, it is quite possible that this translation of the knowledge into practice may have been enriched by her own experience in the field as suggested by Schön (1990). Considering that Tania worked in a daycare centre prior to her training, she may have been able to take these prior experiences and use these as reference points in her training. Instead of learning theories without linking it to actual classroom practice, she was able to directly reflect on her previous experiences in the classroom and make more informed decisions. Furthermore, the belief in the importance of documentation and focused portfolios can also be considered a peripheral belief (Haney & McArthur, 2001) a belief that was developed in her training and later reinforced at her daycare centre. It appears that this particular approach to documentation is key in her center and therefore has been reinforced by her post-service experiences as well (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Milena also shares in the belief of documentation as a relevant method to observe and record the children's development. It is possible that she may have been originally exposed to documentation through her pre-service experiences working in a daycare setting with her aunt. However, learning about the concepts of focused portfolios and documentation is something that she attributes to her training. It appears that her post-service experience (Haney & McArthur, 2001) has influenced her current beliefs as she continues to reflect what she learned in her training into the classroom. Hence her espoused beliefs about the role of documentation can be observed in her classroom practice (Dewey, 1933, Schön, 1983).

Scaffolding. Another important practice that all four educators were exposed to in their training program was the scaffolding of play. Although each educator may have developed a general appreciation for the practice of scaffolding in learning, it was clear that their post-service experiences helped them develop this practice. There is another key link

here between the relevance of post-service experiences influencing the educators' beliefs about play. It is clear from listening to the educators' beliefs about play that their training served an important element in teaching them about specific skills related to play (Kagan, 1992; Chow & Long, 2009). It is also important to mention that it is not solely the educators' training experiences that influenced their learning but a combination between pre-service and post-service experiences (Haney & McArthur, 2001). As the educators seemed to already possess core beliefs (Haney & McArthur, 2001) about play prior to their training, these beliefs helped them filter new knowledge into pre-existing beliefs (Kagan, 1992; Chong & Low, 2009) and later reflect them in practice.

Adrienne affirmed that scaffolding was a technique that she learned about through her training program. Adrienne mentioned briefly a connection between her ECE courses and her classroom practice here. She talked about learning about Vygotsky and how she believes that as an educator she can scaffold the play and help the children reach that next level in their knowledge and understanding. She described scaffolding as the process where she "or a peer could help give temporary support to a child in helping them understand a concept." By joining in the play or offering suggestions, Adrienne sometimes offered this support, as described in her case study where she helped support the child who wanted to draw a drain. Here she was able to reflect her beliefs in her own practice. Instead of doing the drawing for him, she gave him the necessary support to work towards that goal successfully. This is an example of Adrienne's belief in the importance of scaffolding and how she reflected this belief in practice (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1990).

Ellen acknowledged that scaffolding is a term that was introduced to her in her training and something that she continues to use daily with the children in her care. She indicated that sometimes as the children play she uses scaffolding to help them reach that next level, or as Vygotsky (1978) termed it "their zone of proximal development." In

order to be able to scaffold the children upwards towards that next stage of development, Ellen says she needs to use her observation skills and read the children's cues before stepping into the play scenario. I observed an example of how she was able to scaffold one child's play during my observation in the classroom, reflecting her own beliefs into practice. Ellen told me about one child who often stood on the sidelines and acted as an onlooker in his play. She had observed in her anecdotes that colors and sizes and shapes really fascinated him, so she set up the learning environment one day with classifying bears and sorting trays to grab his attention. It worked. He ended up playing parallel with one of his peers for 35 minutes.

Ellen believes she has been able to transfer this experience into her current classroom. She observes the children and then finds opportunities to scaffold them in their play. In connecting and transferring this knowledge from her training into the classroom Ellen was able to make sense of the information she learned in her college classroom (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1990). This suggests that she was able to 'reflect-on-action' (Schön, 1990) on the theories and knowledge that she internalized through her training and brings this knowledge into her classroom practice. Perhaps her years of experience in the field have enabled her to use a variety of strategies in applying the process of scaffolding, which may suggest that practice in the field coupled with training enhances the ability to transfer and apply learning from one context to another.

Milena also believes that another one of her roles, as an educator is to facilitate the children's play "by offering them support, guidance, and scaffolding when necessary." She explained further, "I mean we scaffold and we go uh like with the interests that they have." As part of her role in scaffolding the children's learning, she believes it is imperative to help set up the children for success. She refers to a practical example in her classroom where the children were struggling with the concept of money and paying in a

grocery store "...but they didn't get the concept of like having to pay and getting the change back. My role is to pick up on that and I'll see and then I'll just model it. So I'll like go in and... 'what did you buy today?' And I go in and I give them the example. And then I do it once and then I step back and try to see if they pick up on it you know?"

As part of her role in the classroom, Milena believes that she can help facilitate the children's play by offering them support when needed. She uses her observation skills to help her ascertain when the children may need help, for instance when one child needed help painting her face. Instead of telling the child what to do, Milena gave her gentle suggestions to help extend her knowledge. Here we see a direct link between her training and classroom practice as she recalled learning about the process of scaffolding during her schooling program. Tania also believes that she can attribute her understanding of scaffolding to her training program. She describes her role in this process is "to scaffold the children and help extend their play, in any way possible." Tania believes it is important to "encourage the children to be curious and to know that they are in a safe environment, where they can seek answers to their questions, and take risks." There is a direct link here with Bruner's (1983) concept of scaffolding, which involves offering a temporary support to the child until meaning is achieved and then taking that scaffold away. It appears that both Milena and Tania's training (post-service experiences) played an important role in their understanding of scaffolding (Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999). Although Milena was not able to directly relate the name of the theorist, she was able to recollect learning about scaffolding and relate it to a practical context. This suggests that she was able to reflect on her training and then relate it to practice (Schön, 1983). Also, this suggests that she is able to articulate her own beliefs and explain how they get transferred into practice.

Tania also believes in the relevance of helping the children move beyond their everyday behaviours by assisting them to engage in behaviours in their zone of proximal development (ZPD). This again, is something she attributed to learning in her courses in ECE. She seems to be able to articulate her belief and transfer this belief in practice. She made a connection between theory and practice as she discussed her ability to help children reach that next level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). She explained that she would observe the children's play and then help scaffold the children to that next level: "I try to guide them when I think they may need help, but then I step back to let them take control of the play scenario." It seems that she was able to transfer her training in scaffolding into the actual classroom environment. This seems to reflect Kagan (1992) and Haney and McArthur's (2001) contention that strong or "core" beliefs can serve as important filters in transferring new knowledge into pre-existing schemas. Tania was able to take her core beliefs about play and then implement what she learned in her training into the classroom (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011).

Flexible Environment

An interesting theme emerged from conversations with the educators relating to their classroom practice (i.e., the curriculum and the materials provided for play). The educators all shared specific examples of how they try to ensure that the schedule is flexible in order to support the children's play. Namely, they felt that it was important to ensure that the curriculum and schedule was flexible and that the classroom afforded many choices and opportunities for the children to explore through hands-on activities. In the following section I will share the educators' beliefs about going with the flow (being flexible) and about offering a plethora of materials and choices.

Just go with the flow. Although not every educator discussed the relevance of having a flexible classroom and schedule, three of the four made specific reference to it.

Ellen believes in “embracing the moment and in being flexible in the classroom and outdoors.” She needs to always be receptive to the children’s interests and their daily moods. She believes that “a skilled educator needs to be flexible enough during play to go with these moments and not worry about whether or not the story was read at 10:15 or the next day.” Tania shares a similar view that “being able to change or adapt plans based on the moment and the interests of the children,” is extremely important. Although she feels a routine is important, she clarifies “you have to be willing to change it.” Just as Ellen mentioned, Tania feels that “...part of being flexible was related to observing the children’s reactions and responses and then being open-minded in terms of observations.” Here we see a direct link to these educators’ peripheral beliefs about play (Haney & McArthur, 2001). These are not necessarily beliefs that have been developed since childhood but certainly play an important role in helping them decide how they plan their curriculum.

Milena also believes that an important part of the learning environment is ensuring that it is flexible. Milena’s daily schedule involves “...being flexible in the routines and responding to the children’s needs.” Milena believes that children need routines and stability in their lives, so she tries to provide this daily. However, she believes that she does not have to follow this schedule to a tee as Tania and Ellen have both suggested. She explains, “if it’s a beautiful day... and I have like this activity planned. Uh I am probably gonna choose to stay out like an extra twenty twenty-five minutes with the kids.” Typically Milena believes learning how to be flexible is something she has developed in her early years but also through her training. Milena seems to attribute the belief in being flexible with the children’s play to her pre-service experience working with children in her aunt’s home daycare (Haney & McArthur, 2001; Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999).

All three educators—Ellen, Tania and Milena—indicated they believe that their training played a role in helping them learn to engage in a flexible schedule. It seemed

that these post-service experiences (Haney & McArthur, 2001) influenced their own beliefs, and perhaps even reinforced them, as they spoke about planning a balance of activities. Tania, Ellen and Milena seemed able to connect their prior experiences through their training with actual classroom practice, an important element in transferring espoused beliefs into practice (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). Also important to mention is the ability that these educators have in reflecting on the spot and adapting plans based on their observations. Ellen, Tania and Milena seemed capable of engaging in what Schön (1990) termed reflection-in-action, as they were able to reflect in the moment and make necessary changes on the spot. In Ellen's case she was flexible in ending story time early because the children showed an interest in going back to building their castle out of blocks. In Tania's case, she observed that the children wanted to go outdoors, so she took them outside. In Milena's case, she decided to stay out longer, based on her observation of their engagement with being outdoors. In each of these cases, the educators are cognizant of their espoused beliefs and are able to incorporate both theoretical and practical components of play into their classrooms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) .

Another important difference among these three women was the impact of pre-service experience (Haney & McArthur, 2001) in transferring espoused beliefs into practice. Milena's pre-service professional experience (working in her aunt's daycare) coupled with her training (post-service) helped to solidify her beliefs and bring them into her own practice. This may also be the case for Tania who worked in a daycare while completing her program. Perhaps having the opportunity to directly reflect on what she was being taught Schön's (1990) "reflection-in-action" and trying it out in practice through professional experience facilitated the translation of espoused theory into practice (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011).

Not all four educators shared similar views with regard to flexibility in the classroom. Whereas Ellen, Milena, and Adrienne were inclined to leave choice of activities very open ended, Tania in her classroom used a planning board where the children were asked to choose three areas for free-play every morning after circle time. Once each child chose their three free play areas they could begin their play. Tania was the only educator that adapted this type of planning board. She explained that this was a way to encourage the children to think through what they wanted to do and how they wanted to play. However, she emphasized the importance of being flexible and allowing the child to change their mind if they decided half way through the free play period that they wanted to play elsewhere. It appears that the use of this type of planning board and the flexibility that she discussed may have been influenced by her pre-service experiences (Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999) as she worked in a daycare setting while attending classes in the evening part-time. It is possible that because she was already exposed to the use of a planning board in the daycare setting prior to her training that this became a peripheral belief (Haney & McArthur, 2001) for Tania.

Plethora of choice. Adrienne believes that one of biggest challenges that was reinforced in her training was the importance of giving children choice to select materials (open-ended, closed-ended), learning areas and play partners. Adrienne likes to give the children choices throughout the day and does not believe in limiting the use of toys or the number of children per play space. She explains here "...if six kids want to squish around the table, 'Who am I to stop them?' " Giving children choices means they should be "free to pursue their interests," so if they want to take the cars to the dramatic area, they should be able to do so. Adrienne adds when we place too many restrictions on children's play creativity may be stifled.

Ellen also shared in the belief that the children must be provided with many choices throughout the day. Ellen was able to reflect this belief in her practice by offering a plethora of open-ended materials and choices for the children. I observed this belief being reflected through her practice as she would rotate the materials on a regular basis giving children chance to discover the different uses of the materials. Ellen wants them to choose how they will use the tools in the classroom, such as using different “tools in the sand and water table such as funnels, cups, ladles, and colanders.” She believes that a balance between open-ended (do not have to be used in one prescribed way) and closed-ended (such as puzzles) materials and activities must be provided daily. Ellen in fact discusses learning about different types of materials and activities in her 3-year DEC in ECE. She spoke specifically about her Play course and the materials her teacher introduced her to: “lots of puppets, flannel boards, sensory boards and bottles, open-ended toys.” In Ellen’s case she seemed capable of transferring the knowledge learned in her training and reflecting this in practice (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011).

Milena also manifested the espoused belief that children need to have “many choices throughout the day; you can’t just give them the same old stuff every day to play with— they will get bored.” She explained that besides having choices the “materials need to be child-sized, age-appropriate and focus on the children’s interests.” Milena believes in also giving children opportunities “as much as possible in allowing the children to bring various materials to different areas of the classroom” as they play. Milena is able to reflect this espoused belief in practice as she engages in what Dewey (1933) calls reflective practice telling me about two boys on the videotape that are busy building in the block corner. They are engaged in their play building a ship together when one child mentions to the other that they need to get food to put in their ship. The

two boys wander over to the dramatic corner and fill up a basket with goodies and strut back over to sit inside their ship. Milena believes that this is a wonderful example of why it is so important that choice be a big part of the day. Milena seems able to reflect on her learning from her training and apply it directly to her classroom practice as she encourages flexibility and choice (Dewey, 1933). Perhaps her professional experience working with her aunt coupled with her training helped her make this transition from theory into the classroom.

Tania also believes that part of her role “in encouraging the children’s play is to ensure that they have many choices.” A choice entails materials, toys, activity areas, etc. She believes that it is imperative that she “follow the children’s lead, and provide them with numerous choices as they play in the classroom.” Tania feels that offering choices is also linked with the development of keen observation skills (as learned through her training) “in fact they go hand in hand.” She believes in taking “...time each day to just sit back, observe, and listen to what the children are doing and saying.” She believes in “giving children opportunities to make decisions and to choose their own games, play partners, and types of play helps them to build character and creativity.”

A very interesting revelation for Tania occurred as she was discussing the importance of giving the children choices. She mentioned that prior to her training, she “used to plan more educator-directed activities,” which she also conducted. It appears that prior to her training a peripheral belief (Haney & McArthur, 2001) for Tania was the importance of more teacher-directed play activities. However, it appears her post-service experiences seems to have influenced her beliefs and resulted in a change in her core beliefs. She describes here: following her training, “...I learned that it was important to give the children opportunities to direct their own play and offer a balance of choices, activities in the classroom.” She explains “I never knew that what I was doing was wrong,

or that it could hinder the children's creative play, that was huge for me." Tania seemed to be able to engage in what Dewey (1933) referred to as 'reflective practice,' as she reflected here on theory/knowledge introduced in course work and then translated this information into her own organization of activities for the children. Following her training, Tania was able to provide children with activities that were directed by the child as opposed to being solely teacher-directed. Here we see that her original peripheral beliefs were influenced and changed through her training. I observed her giving the children choices in their play through the different activities she organized and set out for the children throughout the day. The activities appeared to stem from the interests of the group and reflected a very open-ended approach where the children were free to engage as they saw fit, as opposed to being teacher-directed with several steps showing the children an end result. Tania seemed to be able to reflect on her espoused beliefs and then point out practices that she does in the classroom that are congruent with these beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). For example, during one of the videotaped processes Tania observed the children's interest in snow and water. She brought in fresh fallen snow from outside and set up two tables with snow, paint, spray bottles, spoons, spatulas and measuring cups for the children to explore. She explained to the children that they were free to play with the material as they wished.

It seems that Tania uses a combination of professional experience and reflection in making the transfer of knowledge into practice (Schön, 1990). The fact that Tania had previous experience working in daycare prior to her training seems to have played an important role in her ability to translate her knowledge into the classroom. The prior experience coupled with a combination of what Schön (1983) calls "trial and error" (as she tries out new ideas and techniques) seems to have helped Tania translate the new knowledge into her planning and classroom activities. Tania seems capable of

articulating her beliefs, and practicing them in the classroom incorporating both theoretical and practical components of play.

Training

In terms of their training programs, two of the educators, Ellen and Milena, completed a three-year DEC program with a specific course on “Play”, while Tania and Adrienne completed the Attestation in ECE while working simultaneously in daycare. Despite the fact that their training programs were different in duration and some course content, this did not seem to impact their attitudes towards play. Each educator exclaimed that their training did not alter or change their beliefs on play; rather it provided them with greater focus and consolidated their own thoughts and beliefs. They all felt that their training was a rich experience that gave them practical ideas on how to observe the children’s play, scaffold the children’s development, provide lots of hands-on learning experiences, and provide a flexible schedule that followed the interests and abilities of the children. Although the educators emphasized that their pre-service experiences played a role in the development of their general play beliefs, it is clear that their formal training contributed to additional ideas and practices in their play repertoires.

I will now turn to the educators’ training programs to discuss these findings in greater depth.

Attestation. It is important to reiterate that both Adrienne and Tania did not receive a full course on Play, as did their DEC counterparts; however, this was not reflected in any apparent diminished understanding of the role and impact of play in ECE. In both Adrienne and Tania’s cases, they seemed able to match the beliefs and approaches they ascribed to with their current practice. In fact, Adrienne states that although her training program didn’t change her beliefs, “it enhanced it. I learned new things. Like you know new ways, new games to present to the kids. Or new ideas on how to play; on how not to play with them, but

just different things to do you know.” Tania also shares in this belief as she states “I think my training just really consolidated my beliefs. It helped me see that what I was doing already was good, but maybe needed a bit of tuning.” She continues to explain “I don’t think my training changed what I already believed in, but it just helped me see things from a different perspective, helped me learn about different stages and ages and apply that to my classroom practice.”

Both Adrienne and Tania, who completed the Attestation program while working in a daycare, found that their training proved to be a confidence booster, as it affirmed that they were doing things in an appropriate way or taught them how to make necessary changes to support the children. To some extent Adrienne and Tania’s stories demonstrate that they did need their training to provide them with the reassurance that they were on the right track. Despite entering their training programs with a number of core beliefs about play, it is clear that both Tania and Adrienne’s training contributed additional ideas and practices to their play. Both educators explained that their training experiences seemed to be positive in that they reinforced previous beliefs, as well as added and expanded to their prior knowledge.

Another similarity between these two educators was the fact that prior to their training they were not familiar with many of the theorists (i.e., Piaget, Vygotsky, Mead, Bruner); however, they claim that many of the ideas reflected in the dominant theories were already evident in their educational practices prior to their formal training (as they both worked in daycare while completing their training programs). It seems that the training program did impact the types of activities and materials that both educators chose to set out as described in the section of beliefs and classroom materials. Perhaps their prior professional experiences helped them make necessary connections between theories, developmental stages, and types of play as stated by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983, 1990)

who have advocated for the importance of reflection on past and current experiences. At this point in time, it is difficult to ascertain at what level of understanding their knowledge was prior to their training; nevertheless it is important to note that their beliefs about the value of play only strengthened following their training. One thing is clear, the educators were cognizant of their own beliefs and were able to transfer these beliefs into their classrooms.

DEC. Both Ellen and Milena completed the 3-year full time DEC in ECE.

Ellen claims that her “beliefs evolved during her training,” as she was able to extend her repertoire of knowledge to better accommodate the children in her care. Her training seemed to provide her with many rich ideas and helped her know how to set up the learning environment to better meet the needs of the children (as discussed above in the section on plethora of choices). She did claim that her training was “very rich and encouraged me to delve into frequent self-reflection.” It seems that Ellen was aware of the process of translating the knowledge learned in her training to a new context as she discussed the self-reflection involved in the process (Schön, 1990). As Dewey (1933) described, reflection is useful in teacher training programs; it seems that reflection was helpful in Ellen’s case as it enabled her to reflect on her training and current practice as she evaluated the activities and responses of the children through on-going observations. This process seemed to be beneficial for Ellen as she was able to later adapt the activities and materials to better support the children’s play. This adaptability on her part was reflected in her observation that teacher-directed activities should not guide the play for the day, but instead she should be setting out a plethora of open-ended and creative opportunities for the children to extend their knowledge.

Milena spoke a great deal about the impact of her training on her beliefs as she completed the 3-year DEC in ECE full-time. She spoke about the role of her professional experiences (pre-service experience working in daycare prior to her training)

and her training in ECE (post-service experience) (Haney & McArthur, 2001), both of which she believes enabled her to transfer theory into the classroom. She believes that “my experiences helped set the foundations for my beliefs about play.” This seems to be in line with the research (cf. Anning, 1991) stating that early experiences serve a pivotal point from which learning can continue to develop. Anning (1991) and Conners (1978) stated that early childhood educators’ thinking may be guided in part by a personally-held system of culturally derived beliefs and values, and by a broad knowledge of content and teaching strategies that inform their teaching practice and go largely unarticulated (Cruickshank, 1990; Elbaz, 1983). Milena’s previous held beliefs and experiences as an educator seem to be articulated through her practice. Her early experiences were fruitful, in that they provided her with the confidence and desire to pursue her studies in ECE.

Milena believes that some of the different courses she took “enabled her to focus on developing and refining her beliefs about play and children’s overall development.” She reflected on these courses, “...like play, and psychology, and we learned how to watch the children play, figure out what kinds of play they were doing.” She always believed in the relevance of play prior to her training, but she “never knew what toys to use to stimulate the children’s development or how to enter the play and help extend.” She believes a pivotal experience in this course was “using the lab school” where she would sit on the opposite side of the one-way mirror and observe the children as they played in the classroom. It appears that for Milena her post-service experiences played an important role in helping her reflect on her current beliefs and practice (Haney & McArthur, 2001). She believed that this course, in particular, was helpful in that:

...we would observe children and the class taught us how to like uh record like the things that were happening in a certain setting. So uh we would observe and

learn about how to prepare an early childhood setting. And how does that work, and every like every theme had like some topic. Uh, and she would {referring to the teacher} show us all these old fashioned toys. And we would go around the class and we would see how it would feel for us.

Milena's training program included a specific Play course that helped her understand how to bring play into the classroom. By observing in the two-way mirror and watching tapes of the children playing in class she learned "how to look for play and how to really develop the play." As described in their research, Decorte (1999) and Perkins and Salomon (1989) believe that in order for an educator to engage in the mindful transfer of principles to a new situation, the educator must be able to draw upon relevant prior knowledge to construct new learning experiences in different contexts in the classroom. Educators especially need to be prepared for this transfer, since this is the basis of their classroom curriculum. In order to transfer knowledge, the educator must be able to see similarities between prior learning (theory and practice) and the current situation and then find opportunities in which he/she can transfer this knowledge to the current context (DeCorte, 1999). Milena's experience in her training program observing the children as they played and then planning different ways to stimulate them was beneficial for her learning. As well, she felt that her professional experiences working alongside her aunt at an early age gave her practical experience that she could use as a foundation during her training. It seems that she was able to take in the new knowledge learned through her training and adapts this into practice incorporating both theoretical and practical play knowledge.

Working and training. An important finding that emerged in the cases was the impact of attending classes concurrently with employment in an early childcare facility. Adrienne and Tania both worked part time while attending their Attestation training in Early

Childhood. This is an important factor for discussion as it may help to clarify the relevance of applying information learned in training directly to a classroom context. As mentioned earlier most students enrolled in the Attestation program work concurrently as they complete the program in the evening or have worked in childcare facilities prior to their training. The other two educators, Ellen and Milena, both completed the 3 year DEC full time, therefore they did not have the opportunity to apply what they were learning in their classrooms.

Perhaps because Adrienne was working while completing her Attestation in ECE this may have enabled her to transfer theory into practice with greater facility (Schön, 1990). In our interviews, Adrienne explained her ease to take a concept learned in her training, such as scaffolding, and then to directly apply this theory in practice. She discussed how her ECE courses helped her apply scaffolding in the classroom: "...I could go into my classroom and then try out what I was learning, like scaffolding I got to try this out. I might play to help perhaps extend the thinking, and in asking the questions or giving them questions that would extend the thinking, and extend the ideas and create more possibilities." She claims that she did this by reflecting on her current practice with the children in her classroom. Adrienne seemed to be engaging in what Dewey calls (1933) calls reflective practice as she took a new concept or a new approach and tried it out in the classroom. This also suggest that her post-service experiences (Haney & McArthur, 2001) seemed to play an important role in her development of play beliefs. The fact that she was working while completing her degree was helpful in that she could directly reflect on her practice in the moment (Dewey, 1933).

Michelet (1986) and Bowman (1990) suggest that one of the major impediments in incorporating play into the classrooms is the lack of transfer of theory into practice. Adrienne explains that she was able to reflect on her learning in her program and apply it "I was going to school at night, so I could think about what I was doing in class and then try it out in my own classroom." Perhaps because she was able to reflect on her beliefs and knowledge about

play, this may have helped her apply the beliefs in her own classroom (Burridge et al., 2010; Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). Adrienne seemed able to apply her beliefs into the classroom as she made certain choices to prompt children to extend their play or help them explore a concept further.

It seems that she relies on-in-the moment spontaneity supported by prior experience and knowledge when making decisions in the classroom (Schön, 1983). She is able to reflect both theoretical and practical play beliefs into her classroom practice. I observed this spontaneity as the children were talking about making snowmen as they watched the snow falling outside. Tania started asking them questions about the different body parts of the snowman. She asked them to think about what they could use for each part. As the children started blurting out various items such as yarn, branches, buttons and carrots, Tania started to jot this down on paper. She then told all the children to freeze and take a snap shot of that snowman in their head. Next she asked them all to line up and told them they were going outside to make their snowmen. This was on-the-spot spontaneity tying in her beliefs and knowledge. The fact that Tania had previous experience working in daycare prior to her training seems to have had an important role in her ability to translate her knowledge into the classroom. The prior experience coupled with a combination of what Schön (1983) calls “trial and error” seems to be important as trying out new ideas and activities on the fly is something that Tania appreciates.

What was that name. Two of the educators reported being able to remember the basic elements of their training programs but when it came to naming them this was another story. Adrienne explained that sometimes she could remember the names but other times they escaped her. She shared this example here “I remember about stages of play, but I am not very good at remembering names and who said what.” More important than remembering specific theorist names, is the fact that Adrienne is able to actually

take the theory that she learned in her classroom training and directly implement it in practice or what Schön (1990) terms reflection-in-action. I observed her ability to apply her espoused beliefs about play and developmental differences in practice (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) as she explained to me why she set out a variety of different activities to stimulate the children's cognitive abilities. One morning she set out a self-correcting matching game with various stages. The first element required the children to match based on colours, the next level was on similar shapes, and finally associating both colours to the shapes. She explained to me that the children in her group are at different stages and some are able to distinguish between colours, while others can do both shapes and colours. She claimed that this was a game that supported what she learned about developmental stages in her training (post-service experience) and reflects her ability to reflect on her beliefs and translate them into her classroom (transfer espoused beliefs into practice) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Adrienne explained that "some of the children will even help scaffold others through the process." Even if she is not able to name the exact theories, she is able to distinguish between the different cognitive abilities of the children in their play and she can keep this information in mind when she makes a decision about activities in the classroom. She explains "when I try things out I can really see what the children can do and this helps me make sense of what I know about developmental stages." The fact that Adrienne was not able to remember this theorist's name, but could recall the approaches she brought to the field is noteworthy. This suggests that she was able to make sense out of the academic terminology and bring this knowledge into her own practice in the classroom (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011).

In order to transfer knowledge into practice it is essential to have opportunities to apply directly what is learned to the classroom (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996). One of the major pitfalls of novice educators is that they only have short internships in which to apply what they have learned to practice, Adrienne may have had an advantage over her peers during her training in that she was able to directly apply her learning to her own classroom instead of waiting until she had an internship (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). Hence, the transfer was made easily for her, as she was able to incorporate the knowledge she was exposed to in her training directly into practice. Having the opportunity to use trial-and-error appeared to be an important part of the learning process for Adrienne (Schön, 1983) .

Milena also shares the same challenge that Adrienne faced in not being able to recall the names of important people in the training process. She claims that her training in ECE was significant in that it exposed her to “different theories related to play and child development,” something that she was not exposed to previously. It appears that her post-service experience (Haney & McArthur, 2001) contributed to her ability to transfer her beliefs into the actual classroom. However, like Adrienne, Milena mentioned, “I don’t remember the names of the theories or theorists, but I remember the importance they had.” She spoke specifically about stages of play “I can’t think of his name, but I know that children pass through different stages of development and we need to help them in each of those stages. Just like types of play, like solitary, parallel, cooperative...I know what each child should be able to do when.” She believes learning about developmental stages, types of play and specific ways to adapt the play and extend it helped her choose materials, and set up the environment.

I observed Milena apply this knowledge to her own classroom practice as she observed a new child in the class who would often play by herself. Milena explained to me that this child always brought her “baby” into the class but would never join the

others play. One day Milena helped scaffold this child's play and bring her into a more advanced type of social cognitive play—that of cooperative play. She set up the water tables with soap and sponges and babies and invited this child to wash her baby in the water table. The child delighted in the activity and began to at first wash the baby alongside her peers and then by the end of the activity was actually pretending to care for her friend's baby as well.

Milena believes that her training really helped her understand that "...each child is unique and that learning and development is a qualitative and not quantitative process." She explained to me that every day is different and that each child is different. She refers to the child in the above anecdote who only played in solitary play. She knew that she could not push her too fast, but instead had to take incremental steps in gaining her trust and then developing activities that promoted her interests. Her program helped her understand that development happens over time in increments, not all at once. Milena attributes learning about the "...different types of play and the social aspects associated with each level," to her training. She believes this aspect of her training to be useful, in that it gave her the "...skills to observe the children's play and learn how to guide and extend the play."

Milena was able to make links between particular theorists who impacted her own understanding of child development; however, she did have difficulty remembering names of specific theorists. She was able to refer to learning about cognitive stages of development as described by Piaget (1962), as well as different stages of play which can be attributed to his work reflecting her ability to take information learned in training and apply this to current practice. Even the use of anecdotal records can also be linked to Piaget (1962), as he was one of the first to write anecdotal records on his own children as they played. Even today in her classroom, anecdotes serve a pivotal role in leading the

activities Milena sets out, gearing the schedule of the day, as well in guiding her in choosing appropriate materials. Overall, Milena believes that her training was beneficial in helping her to “develop the necessary skills to support play in the ECE classroom, learning how to observe the children’s play and support and extend that play, in choosing age-appropriate materials to support open-ended play as well.” Nevertheless, she also believes that her own professional experiences have played a large role in influencing who she is and the choices she makes daily. She explored this belief here:

But all these things you pick em up and learn as you go. No matter how much school or how many experiences you have; it’s like every day is different here.

And it’s like you start to mold yourself into a certain, like you have a way of uh teaching these kids and you know running your classroom and things like that.

And it’s all those experiences, things you’ve experienced yourself that make you who you are today.

Sharing play practice. An interesting category that emerged in one of the cases was the dialogue that occurred between the students in their training programs. Adrienne, claimed that having the ability to talk and share ideas was helpful in understanding what she was learning in her training program.

Adrienne described this experience as ‘the sharing of play practices.’ She believes that most of her “aha” moments during her training, really came from her group discussions of play practices with other educators in the classroom: “yeah, that came not so much from what the teacher was telling us, but from just group discussion. And ‘oh I did this in my room.’ Because I usually, it stems from ‘I have a child who has trouble entering play situations.’” Adrienne believes that these moments in her program were the most revealing and significant for her, as they gave her time to connect with her peers and to discuss their own classroom experiences (Potter & Jacques, 1997). The dialoguing moments that she

shared with her peers were affirming because she could reflect on (Schön, 1983) what she was doing and then try it out in practice or “offer what I do in my class and having someone else there, say ‘I’m gonna try that.’ And then they come back a few weeks later and say ‘you know what, that really worked.’” In turn, she believed that these moments in her training helped her consolidate her own understanding of play and connect both the theory she was learning in the training program to her own practices in her daycare classroom.

While it is clear from speaking with Adrienne that the didactic content of her courses has had a significant influence on her (i.e., choice of age appropriate activities, how to adapt or modify activities in the classroom to meet children’s needs, types of play and stages of development), another related element in her formal training has been the knowledge developed through ongoing dialogue with her classmates which has allowed for more reflection on the theories and processes learned in training. According to Adrienne, her courses were instrumental in giving her the opportunity to share ideas, and communicate with other educators enrolled in the program. This dialoguing seemed to have served as an excellent vehicle in transforming theory into practice (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). As the educators were able to sit and share ideas, beliefs, and experiences, they were able to think aloud about what they were learning and how they could transfer this knowledge into classroom practices (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Here there seems to be a connection between dialogue and context in the application of the theories. By giving the students a forum in which they could both reflect on and consider how they were integrated in practice (Boud, et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1990), this seemed to have facilitated the process. The key concept here seems to be the fact that the dialoguing and reflection took place in proximity to their learning environment (college classroom) where Adrienne could share her own personal experiences while transferring the knowledge to different contexts (trying ideas out in various ECE classroom settings) (Potter & Jacques, 2007).

According to Kolb (1984), educators can make changes in their well-established beliefs about teaching and learning by engaging in reflective practice. As Adrienne learned about different approaches and beliefs she was able to discuss with her colleagues both core and peripheral beliefs (Haney & McArthur, 2001). Adrienne's practice of reflecting on practice with others during her training is in line with Kolb's (1984) observations. She was able to talk informally with her peers about best practices and ideas related to play, and then try them out in the classroom, facilitating her transfer into the classroom.

Again, because Adrienne was working concurrently as she completed the Attestation program, she was able to bring personal experiences to the table, as she was learning about stages of play, types of play, etc. Adrienne seemed to be able to construct knowledge in a social context, namely that of her training classroom with other educators (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Accordingly, the sharing brought a great deal of meaning making, as the students collaborated together in the classroom context. Adrienne believes that this sharing was extremely significant to her as well as her colleagues, "...because it helped them continue to develop their own skills and refine them." It was clear that she was capable of incorporating both theoretical and practical play beliefs into her own classroom experiences.

Perhaps a reflective group process is something that may be missing in current teacher training practice? It is also plausible that the fact that Adrienne's group all had prior experience working with children may have facilitated the transfer of knowledge into the classroom. Further, the fact that Adrienne had her own classroom in which to immediately apply the knowledge learned in her training program, may have enhanced the transfer of knowledge. This may support Kessels and Korthagen's (1996) theory, that practical work should take precedence over abstract theory. When students actually apply theories and ideas in practice, this enables them to learn through actions. Further research would need to be done in order to confirm this theory.

A final category that emerged across three of the cases was the questioning of the relevance of play in the ECE classroom by parents. Adrienne, Ellen and Milena all discussed this challenge.

Challenges Faced From Parents

It is necessary to mention that Adrienne did express a concern about some parents' uncertainty towards play in her classroom. According to Adrienne, the children in her care attend an academic preschool program in the morning prior to coming to her classroom. This preschool program is considered to be very rigorous for children and prestigious for the parents, as it claims to prepare the children for school success. This is a common element that many educators face when trying to encourage the children to learn through play (Kagan, 1990). This concern is in line with the research on one of the three cited barriers to the implementation of play in ECE settings, namely 'attitudinal barriers' (Kagan, 1990).

Today's fast paced society is pushing educators towards a didactic curriculum (cf. Elkind, 1990; Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2005). Adrienne tries to counter this challenge by explaining to the parents the value of play. She uses a variety of documentation techniques such as photos, videos, children's work, and anecdotal records to represent the learning that has taken place through play. For example, "raking the leaves the children learn about maple leaves, birch leaves, etc. The children are not taught concepts directly but learn through hands on experiences."

She fears for these children, as they are being "...pressured into becoming miniature adults, instead of enjoying their childhood." Adrienne expressed a concern that the children do not have enough time to be children, and she wants to ensure that the children in her classroom are not deterred from learning through play. To this end, she continues to reinforce the value of play to the parents in her daycare, hoping that eventually they will also see the benefits. She does this by taking photos of the children while they are playing and

then adding a small anecdote under the photo explaining what skills and knowledge they are developing in their play.

Ellen believes that sometimes there are challenges to implementing play in the classroom. She believes that part of her role is helping the parents understand how the children construct their own knowledge through play interactions. She does explain that at times it has been difficult convincing the parents of the value of play. One parent asked her one day if she was teaching their two year old child the concepts of left and right? In response she said “ no, I teach them at the elevators. You know we have to sit back and wait for the elevators I ask ‘do you think the left one is going to come first or the right one?’ And then they have learned left and right but through that I use that as an example in orientation-I didn’t say ‘this is your left hand and that is you right hand.’”

The research identifies attitude as one of the major barriers in the diminishment of play in ECE settings (Kagan, 1990). Ellen explains that she often struggles with parental demands to show that the children are learning, which is stated as one of the impediments to the implementation of play (Anning, 1991; Kagan, 1990). She finds that parents want their children to be reading, writing their names, and doing arithmetic at an early age. This push for earlier learning has been documented in the literature and it has been linked to pressures for a fast paced, hurried life (Anning, 1991; Wood & Attfield, 1996). As a result of this pressure, Ellen finds it challenging to convince some parents of the value of play. She says that in her career she has seen that in many ECE settings the focus has been shifting more towards the “educational part” and the fun in play is taken away. Ellen’s perceptions reflect recent literature citing the push to accelerate academic requirements at earlier ages, including standardized testing, while also diminishing the amount of time for play in ECE classrooms (Shipley, 2008; Stegelin, 2005). Some educators seem to crumble in the face of adversity as they must deal with societal,

functional, and attitudinal barriers (Elkind, 1990). Ellen's strong play beliefs appear to keep her focused and resolute.

Parental attitudes seem to play an enormous role in the type and amount of play educators integrate into their curriculum (Elkind, 1981; Stegelin, 2005). Considering that the focus of some parents is on the productiveness of the child, play sometimes is reserved for periods when work is completed (Stegelin, 2005; Stipek & Byler, 1997). As a result, some educators are faced with parental requests to educate children through didactic methods (Elkind, 1990). Milena's has also received parental requests to provide more formal learning in the classroom (e.g., learning the alphabet, counting, and early literacy). She explained "the fast paced society that we live in comes with many repercussions for the children and families as well."

Milena believes that part of her job as an educator is attempting to overcome some of the challenges she faces in implementing play in the classroom. One of these challenges: "is ensuring that the parents are on board." She believes that the "...parents in general often are too focused on time, and everything is so fast paced that the children do not get the opportunity to explore the world around them." She believes that there are some parents who "...want product-oriented work in the classroom." Part of her job is to reassure these parents that the children are learning through play.

Milena described that in her classroom, many parents have their children enrolled in various extra-curricular activities that consume their time on week nights and weekends ranging from soccer to gymnastics, ballet, piano, etc. This seems to be the reality today; "we do live in a very fast paced society where everyone is in a race to reach the finish line first". This belief can be linked directly to the current literature that suggests that children are growing up in an ever-changing world where they are expected to perform at higher levels at any cost (Elkind, 1981, 2001). Milena says she has

experienced this in her classroom and explained that parents expect their children to perform at high levels. Milena often finds herself defending what the children have done during the day. She explains that, like Adrienne and Ellen, she uses anecdotes to explain to the parents what the children are learning. Although Milena has been pressured by parents to lean toward more formal teaching of academics, she tries to remain true to her own beliefs and convictions.

Tania did not cite educational pressures or societal pressures as a factor in her classroom. The fact that Tania is a parent of two boys that attend the center where she works may play a factor in the lack of pressure from the parents. It is possible that because she is also a parent as well as an educator that she faces less adversity from the parents because they may value her knowledge and trust her judgment. Another possible factor could be her use of a planning board in her classroom to help guide the children in choosing the types of play they will engage in for the day. Typically, the planning board is used daily as a way to encourage the children to reflect on their play, make decisions about what it is they want to do, who they want to play with, and what materials they will need in their play. Tania also has a weekly plan set out for the children that the parents are aware of and can be read easily as it posted on the door. Tania does confess though, that she does not always follow this plan to a "T" as she follows the children's interest primarily. However, it is possible that the parents enjoy knowing what activities their children will be engaged in at the beginning of the week, thus there is less pressure from them to provide an academic curriculum. Further, it is also important to mention the fact that Tania will take snapshots of the children playing daily and then append a brief anecdote for the parents to relish in, similar to the technique used by the other educators. It is possible that this form of documentation is sufficient for her parents as it provides them with clear links between play and learning. Again, perhaps the parents at this center

value the benefit of play and therefore require less academic curriculum. Or it is also possible that these parents believe that daycare should not be academic in nature, therefore they are much more open to the play based concept in Tania's room. Either way, it is obvious that Tania does not seem to face the same academic pressures that her three colleagues seem to face daily in the ECE field.

Final Discussion

In conclusion, it is apparent among all four educators that their pre-service experiences, especially early childhood memories, had an impact on the development of their own beliefs about play (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Pajares, 1992; Richards & Lockheart, 1994; Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999). Specifically, the educators were able to articulate and express their own beliefs and reflect on how these beliefs were developed over the course pre-service and post-service experiences. In each of the cases the educators reflected on the importance of early experiences shared with family and siblings, suggesting that the experiences were created through social interactions (Potter & Jacques, 1997). Particular attention was directed towards the educators' upbringing, importance of playing in nature, and exploring through hands-on play. These early memories appeared to influence the educators' core beliefs and continued to play a vital role in the choices they made as educators.

Considering that educator beliefs are developed through a myriad of experiences over the course of their lives including social interactions with other individuals (i.e., parents, family, children, colleagues, through training, etc.) as well as personal practice (Richards & Lockheart, 1994) it is clear that beliefs are often established by the time they enter their training programs (Sanger & Ogusthorpe, 2011). In fact, the educators in this study expressed very strong beliefs about play or what Haney and McArthur (2001) call 'core beliefs' prior to their actual training. It was clear in communicating with the educators that

they each brought with them core beliefs to their actual training programs. These core beliefs were reflected in their practice as they were able to take new ideas and implement them into their own classrooms.

Chong and Low (2009) and Kagan (1992) advance that beliefs shape how educators interpret and respond to knowledge and experience during teacher training. In fact, they believe that these pre-service beliefs can act as filters through which the educators make sense of the new knowledge. In this research the educators appeared to be able to interpret the new knowledge learned in their training programs and adapt this into their growing repertoire of play beliefs. For instance, the educators' beliefs about play developed and evolved over the course of their training as they learned the importance of observing, scaffolding and providing the children with a plethora of choices during their play. The educators were able to filter this new information through their pre-existing beliefs and translate them into practice. Through reflective experience both in and outside of the classroom they were able to interpret new information and alter and expand their existing beliefs.

Although it is not clear what the educators' level of understanding was prior to their training, it was evident that both the DEC and Attestation programs in ECE played a valuable role in helping the educators expand their current beliefs and knowledge about play. In fact, the educators actually attributed a great deal of knowledge to both training programs and spoke specifically about the role of their Observing, Activities and Play courses. Each educator shared specific techniques and approaches that they were able to take from their programs and apply in practice (i.e., how to model in the play, scaffold play, extend the children's play). This may suggest that although educators may enter training programs with pre-determined beliefs and knowledge this knowledge can be expanded on and transferred into classroom practice (Kagan, 1992).

Another interesting finding was the ability of the educators to transfer their 'core' beliefs and knowledge into their actual classroom practice (Kagan & Smith, 1988; Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Schön, 1990). It appears that the educators' 'core' beliefs impacted their belief-action relationship (because they held very strong beliefs about play) making it easier for them to transfer beliefs into practice. The use of interpersonal process recall appeared to be a valuable technique for the educators in that it enabled them to reflect and explain out loud why they made certain choices and how they saw their own beliefs manifest through practice.

The fact that two of these educators had a classroom at their disposal to try out new ideas seemed to have facilitated their transfer of play beliefs into practice. This may suggest that training programs could benefit from having more hands-on practicum time in their programs to help educators make the necessary transfer of knowledge into practice.

Finally, three of the educators cited parental pressures (Kagan, 1992) as a potential barrier to implementing play in their classroom. This finding is common in the research and has been cited as one of the barriers to the implementation of play in early childhood settings (Kagan, 1992). Although parental pressures did not appear to inhibit these educators from reflecting their play beliefs in the classroom, it warrants further study.

CHAPTER X

Contributions of the Research

The rich information and understanding that has emerged from this study serve to extend empirical, methodological, theoretical, and practical knowledge. In the following subsections this information will be discussed.

Empirical. Research studies to date have used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of educator beliefs (Kessels & Korthagen 1996; Moon & Reifel, 2008; Pajares, 1992; Ryu, 2003; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). This research employed a postmodern orientation along with rigorous qualitative methods in order to describe, explore, and understand early childhood educators' beliefs about play and practice. The results of the study deepen our understanding of educators' constructions of play beliefs and help widen the field of research most specifically in Québec. This study provides valuable information about the importance of pre-service experiences in the development of educators' core beliefs. Further, the study provides insight into how educators' develop play beliefs and how they are able to translate the beliefs into their own classroom practice through reflective practice. It is clear that these four educators' beliefs have been developed in conjunction with both pre-service (early childhood experiences, upbringing) and post-service experience. The educators value the knowledge learned in their training programs and have been able to adapt this new information into their already existing beliefs.

Additionally, the novel use of Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) in the methodology in an educational setting contributed to rich data. Typically IPR is used in the field of counseling and psychotherapy as a way to encourage clients to reflect on the moment as they view their sessions with their therapist (Clarke, 1997; Elliot, 1986;). As an interview method IPR allows the researcher to obtain firsthand insight into the educators' thoughts and beliefs through observation and then by directly asking the educator to comment on the practical

classroom interactions as they unfold. Research on IPR (Clarke, 1997) suggests that integrating this approach into the data collection process can help develop more insightful and knowledgeable educators. In this study the use of IPR yielded remarkable results in that the educators were able to reflect on their practice as they viewed the videotapes, something that an interview alone would not be able to accomplish. The use of IPR in this study allowed for a rare window of opportunity to evolve as the educators actually had the chance to reflect on what it was they were doing in the classroom and how it reflected their own beliefs, essentially allowing for a period of reflection and growth.

Methodological. This study offers an innovative approach to data collection by incorporating IPR as a research tool. In most teacher beliefs studies (see Pajares, 1992) the research tools encompass observations, interviews, and questionnaires with participants; however this study moves beyond the usual scope of data collection towards a process that involves reflecting on beliefs and practice through the use of video-taped classroom recall with participants. As mentioned above, IPR is typically used in psychotherapy sessions with clients (Clarke, 1997), though not frequently as a methodological instrument. By adopting this research tool I have expanded options for educational research and hopefully will encourage researchers to adopt this tool into future research studies.

Theoretical. An educators' belief framework guided this study and focused on three particular dimensions to make sense of the data. The primary focus was the educators' pre-service and post-service experiences (Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005; Tillema, 1998), followed by an examination of the relationship between core and peripheral beliefs (Richards & Lockheart, 1994), and finally an examination of espoused beliefs versus actual practice (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1990).

Findings of this study have contributed to the growing body of knowledge about educators' beliefs about play. The study highlighted the relevance of both pre-service and post-service experiences in developing play beliefs. This finding is relevant for future educators, teacher trainers, as well as training programs as the information provided in the cases may help in understanding the importance in tracking the influence of both pre-service and post-service experience in the construction of ECE educators' play beliefs. The findings may lead to changes in ECE training programs including more reflective practice exercises for the students, integration of lab daycare services for students to use in conjunction with their training, as well as prolonged time in fieldwork. Further, the fact that early experiences were deemed to contribute in part to the educators' play beliefs may offer new information in tracking how beliefs are transferred into the classroom context. In line with the literature, educators' core beliefs often lead their current practice.

In adopting a constructivist philosophical approach I was able to reflect on the findings as they were co-created in dialogue between myself and the participants. I assumed a relativist ontology, namely that there is no universal or objective truth, therefore the knowledge created throughout the case studies is based on the lived experiences of the educators. The realities that emerged—the educators' beliefs about play—were constructed socially through dialogue (Kvale, 1995) and reflected their personal experiences. Adopting a subjectivist epistemology, the research process was collaborative as I worked alongside the participants to develop categories that reflected their beliefs about play. My collaborative orientation ensured a trusting relationship between myself and the educators in which meaning was co-constructed between us. Throughout the process we were in constant communication about the categories that stemmed from their specific experiences and beliefs about play (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Practical. The rich nature of the case studies provides practical implications for the field of Early Childhood Education. Since the findings suggest that childhood experiences contribute significantly to core beliefs about play, current training programs should allow for more reflective periods where students can discuss impact of early memories on their beliefs (taking into consideration culture, upbringing, ethnicity). Understanding the role of pre-service experiences may help teacher trainers to adapt the teaching methods and approaches in order to help students filter new knowledge through these 'core' beliefs while also accommodating and reflecting on their peripheral beliefs. Further, while these early experiences contribute a foundation of core beliefs, many of the specific interventions implemented by the educators can be traced to practices and activities introduced during their formal training. Therefore, this suggests that training programs, whether it be the DEC or Attestation have an important role to play in guiding educators towards finding important techniques and strategies that can help them transfer the knowledge they have accumulated through both early experiences with play and their training programs. Adopting the use of IPR processes in the actual training program would be an asset for both the students as well as the teacher trainers. The IPR process can be implemented both during class time and fieldwork experience as students videotape themselves carrying out certain activities and later go back and view the videotaped processes reflecting on their beliefs and actions. Additionally, the results of this study suggest that a combination of classroom training with practical experience (working in a daycare while training or prior to training) can serve as a useful pedagogical package. Hopefully, pre-service educators as well as tenured educators alike will be able to relate to the rich description in the narratives and situate themselves within the lens of the conceptual framework. Ideally, this research can help in-service educators become more reflective of their own beliefs and the process that they go

through in acting on those beliefs. Educators need to be able to articulate their play beliefs before they can adequately transfer those beliefs into practice. Finally, the results will hopefully impact the scope of training programs in ECE and reflect a more hands on approach, one where the educators are able to apply what they are learning in supportive environments.

Limitations

The sample population group was composed of only female participants, and this therefore may have limited the scope of experiences. Further, because the participants belonged to a group of *either* DEC or Attestation graduates, the differences between these programs in combination with the varied experiences of the participants working in ECE prior to and during the course of the program may have impacted the findings as the educators each came to their training programs with varied experience. Additionally, the female participants were from a limited age bracket 25-32 years of age, therefore using different age brackets may have resulted in different findings. As well, because the participants were gathered from one college this may have impacted the type of training and experiences. Future research could also expand the study to include participants from other colleges within the province.

Suggestions for Future Research

Considering the narrow focus of the participants, future research could widen the scope and extend the possible participants to a variety of backgrounds, contexts, training programs, as well as languages in order to provide an opportunity to transfer the findings to a wider population. In a similar vein, extending the study to include multi-provincial participants and programs would help in discovering how educators' beliefs are constructed and acted on in practice throughout Canada.

Further, the use of a clearly defined teacher beliefs framework appears to be missing in our current theoretical frameworks. Further research should extend the current theoretical framework in order to provide more opportunities for the analysis of teacher beliefs in both daycare and elementary school education. Understanding how teacher beliefs are formed, the experiences that are vital in the development and evolution of teacher beliefs, and how these beliefs get translated into practice is crucial.

In addition, a longitudinal study of the development and enactment of teacher beliefs could prove to be beneficial not only for the educators but for the field of education as well. Perhaps following the educator candidates throughout their training program and into their first few years of teaching could prove to yield interesting findings.

It is imperative to track how educators develop play theories and then how they learn to develop and translate these beliefs into practice. A deeper understanding of the role of pre-service experience is needed in order to help teacher trainers understand the value of early memories and their impact on educator beliefs. Future research should also focus on the development of educator play beliefs from the beginning of their training program and into their first few years of training.

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Appendix A
Letter to Director

Dear Director,

I am a Ph.D. student in Psychopedagogy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. David Paré. My thesis project focuses on how Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators' conceptualize and perform play in relation to their formal training and classroom practice. More specifically, I am trying to understand how ECE educators make sense of play in theory and how they perform it in practice.

I have received approval from the Ethics Review Board at the University of Ottawa to pursue my project. I am currently searching for educators who have graduated from an English formal training program in Québec within the last eight years and who currently work with children between the ages of 3-and 5. I need to find two educators per classroom willing to participate individually in two interview sessions over the course of six to eight weeks. Furthermore, I would also like to observe the educators classroom practices on four full days over the course of six to eight weeks. The interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed for analyses. The classroom observations will be video-recorded to supplement the teacher's interview conversations. The daycare routine and classroom activities will remain the same. The data collected from both the interviews and classroom observations will remain confidential and neither the day care center nor the teacher's names will be divulged. In order to protect the identity of your daycare center I will assign a numerical code. A pseudonym will be given to identify each educator and classroom observed. Only myself, and my research supervisor will have access to the audio and videotapes. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my supervisor's office for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. The data collection procedures will be used to provide a deeper understanding of how ECE educators make sense of play theory and how they perform it in practice. This research project may indicate several implications for instructional interventions, as well as shed light on how ECE educators come to construct meaning of play in the early childhood environment.

In regards to the study, I would request your assistance in locating educators within your daycare setting that may be interested in participating in the research project. I am looking specifically for educators who work with children between the ages of 3-and-5 years of age and who have graduated from an English college in Québec with a specialization in ECE within the past eight years. Upon receiving your assistance I would progress by meeting with the interested participants and explaining the study in full to them. I would then ask the educators to sign a consent form giving me permission to interview them on two occasions, as well as observe their classroom processes. The focus of the study is on the educators' beliefs concerning play and their classroom practices; however I will also need to obtain parental consent for the observation sessions, as the children will also appear on the videotapes. I will send a letter and consent form home with each child in order to obtain permission to videotape the children in the educators' classroom. I will also introduce myself to the children in the classroom and request their verbal permission to video tape the classroom activities. Once I receive consent from the

participating educators as well as the parents I will then set up a schedule with the educators for the interviews and observation sessions.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration. If the project is of interest to you, it would be my pleasure to meet with you and answer any queries you may have.

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any questions or concerns.

Appendix B
Letter to Educator

Dear Educator,

I am a PhD student in Psychopedagogy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. David Paré. My thesis project focuses on educators' conceptions of play theory and practice in relation to their formal training (CEGEP). More specifically, I am interested in exploring how you make sense of play in theory and how it is performed in practice.

I have received approval from the Ethics Review Board at the University of Ottawa to pursue my project. I am currently searching for educators who have graduated within the last eight years from an English training program in Québec (specialized in ECE) and who work with children between the ages of 3-and-5. The project will require that I find two educators per classroom to interview individually as well as observe in classroom practice. The study will take place over the course of six to eight weeks and will require that you participate in two individual interview sessions. One interview will be conducted at the beginning of the project and the second at the end of the project. I also would like to observe your classroom practice over the course of four full day sessions which will be video recorded. I will also request the consent from the parents of the children in your classroom to video record the classroom events over the four-day period. As the children are not the focus of the study I will be as unobtrusive as possible. The children's identities as well as your own will never be exposed and will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. All identifying audio and videotapes will be given pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality. The daycare will also be assigned a numerical code in order to ensure anonymity of the centre, and the children who attend the centre. Only myself, and my research supervisor will have access to the audio and videotapes. This research project may indicate several implications for instructional interventions and may shed light on the importance of play in the early childhood environment. Further, this project may be beneficial in assisting ECE educators in understanding how they have come to construct certain conceptions of play in theory and in practice.

In regards to the study, I would request your permission to participate in the research study. Once I have obtained your consent for participation I would then proceed

by sending a letter home to the parents explaining the study and requesting their consent. Once I have received parental permission, I will then set up a schedule for the interviews and observations at your convenience.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration. If the project is of interest to you, it would be my pleasure to meet with you and answer any queries you may have.

Appendix C

Consent Form Educator

Study: Early Childhood Education Educators' Constructions of Play

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier

Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5

Recruitment of Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators aged 18 and above who have graduated within the last 8 years from a Québec College and are currently teaching in an English daycare with children between the ages of 3-and 5-years.

This research project is being supervised by Dr. David Paré of the University of Ottawa, and investigated by Amy Louise Parsons. The intent of the project is to explore Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators' conceptions of play theory and practice in relation to their formal training (CEGEP). If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in a 6 to 8 week research study. As such, your involvement will entail:

1. Attend 2 interviews captured on audio-tape during the 6 to 8 week frame of the study. The interviews will be conducted the first week of the study and the last week of the study.
 - a. Initial interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) at the daycare setting.
 - b. Second interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) guided by video-capture of your classroom practices and will take place at the end of the project at the daycare.
2. Four full day observation periods (captured on video tape) over the course of the 6 to 8 week project. The days will be decided in consort with the educator's schedule.

The interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient to both you and the researcher. The information you will share throughout the study will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be assured by assigning a numerical code to each daycare as well as a pseudonym to each educator so that the daycares name, the children's names and the educator's name will not appear on or identify any transcript. Furthermore, the audiotapes, videotapes, transcripts of interviews, and field notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet of Dr. David Paré for a period of five years following completion of this project after which they will be destroyed. Only the research team, which consists of my thesis supervisor, and myself will have access to the codes and data. Interviews will be sent to you for authentication-where you will have the opportunity to add or elaborate on any part of the interview. You are free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, or observation period, and may refuse to answer questions without prejudice. Also, there will not be any repercussion if you refuse to participate in this study. You will be able to receive, by providing a mailing address below, a summary of the findings of this research in the summer of 2006.

Potential risks involved: There is very minimal risk involved in this project. In the case that you have any regret of disclosing personal information during the interviews that information can be excluded from the study. The researcher will not probe or push you to share experiences that you may be uncomfortable sharing.

CONSENT

By agreeing to participate in this study, I _____ understand that my involvement will consist of sharing personal information about my conception of play theory and practice in the ECE classroom. The purpose of this study is to gain information about my meaning making of play theory and practice in relation to my formal training and classroom practice. I also understand that the results of this study may be presented at a conference and/or published in academic journals but that my name and the daycares name will not be mentioned at any time.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, including before or during the interviews, and before or during the observations. I can also decide to withdraw shared information from the interviews and refuse to answer verbal questions without prejudice.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5, tel.:613-562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I can keep.

Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____
Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any questions or concerns:

Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa
145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier
Ottawa, ON
K1N 6N5

Mail a summary of the results to: _____

Appendix D
Letter for Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a doctoral student in Psychopedagogy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. David Paré. My thesis project focuses on how Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators' conceptualize and perform play in relation to their formal training and classroom practice. More specifically, I am trying to understand how ECE educators make sense of play in theory and how they perform it in practice. My research question is: How do Early Childhood Education Educators' conceptualize and perform play in relation to their formal training and classroom practice?

I have received approval from the Ethics Review Board at the University of Ottawa to pursue my project. Your child's classroom has been selected as one of three-day care centers in the province and your child's educators are participating in the research case studies. These case studies show us how play is taught and incorporated into the early childhood classroom. The research includes four days of classroom observations and two interviews with each classroom educator. The school routines and activities in the classroom and the daycare will remain the same. I will be videotaping the educator's classroom activities (i.e., classroom routines, activities related to play) so that they can later be reviewed. The videotapes will only be viewed by myself, and my research supervisor for data analysis. These tapes will not be shown to others.

This letter is to inform you of what is planned and to obtain your consent. Your child's participation in the research is entirely voluntary and s/he is free to withdraw at any time. No identifying information of children, educators, or the daycare centres will be included in the research. Anonymity is guaranteed by providing a numerical code to each daycare center, and a pseudonym for each participating educator in your child's classroom. All research data are securely stored until the project is completed and then the data are destroyed.

Your child's participation in this research is greatly appreciated. The data collection procedures will be used to provide a deeper understanding of how ECE educators make sense of play theory and how they perform it in practice. This research project may indicate several implications for instructional interventions, as well as shed light on how ECE educators come to construct meaning of play in the early childhood environment. Further, the results of this study will provide important information about play teaching and learning.

Any inquiries about the research study should be addressed to Amy Louise Parsons or Dr. David Paré. We have enclosed two copies of the consent form. Please sign one of them and return it to your child's educator in the envelope provided. You may keep the other copy.

Appendix E

Consent Form Parent/Guardian

Study: Early Childhood Education Educators' Constructions of Play

Amy Louise Parsons (PhD Candidate)

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier

Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5

Request for parental permission to video record the educator's classroom practice on four days over the course of six to eight weeks.

This research project is being supervised by Dr. David Paré of the University of Ottawa, and investigated by Amy Louise Parsons. The intent of the project is to explore ECE educators' conceptions of play theory and practice in relation to their formal training (CEGEP). The educators will be asked to participate in two separate interviews sessions as well as four classroom observation periods. The focus of the classroom observations are on the teacher, however parental consent is required in order to video record the educator's actions as the children will also appear on the video tapes.

The observation period will be video recorded and only the researcher, and the research supervisor will have access to the videotapes. The actual footage of the classroom processes (i.e., classroom activities, routines, provisions for play) will focus on the educator's actions and the daily routines and classroom activities will remain the same. The videotapes will only be used by the principal researcher and the research supervisor. These tapes will not be shown to others. Anonymity will be assured by assigning a numerical code to each daycare center, and a pseudonym for each participating educator. Furthermore, the videotapes and field notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet of Dr. David Paré for a period of five years following completion of this project after which they will be destroyed. Only the research team, which consists of my thesis supervisor, and myself will have access to the codes and data. As mentioned earlier, the focus here is not on your child, but on the actual classroom teacher. Your child is free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an observation period. If you prefer that your child not appear on the videotape the researcher will place the camera out of the range of your child.

Potential risks involved: There is very minimal risk involved in this project. The children will not be harmed in any way by the researcher's presence in the classroom. The purpose of video recording the classroom practice of the educator is to understand how the educators incorporate play into the classroom.

CONSENT

By agreeing to participate in this study, I _____ understand that my child's classroom activities will be observed and video taped on four days over the course of six to eight weeks. The purpose of this study is to gain information on how Early Childhood Education educators' make meaning of play theory and practice in relation to their formal training and classroom practice. I also understand that the results of this study may be presented at a conference and/or published in academic journals but that the name of my child, my child's educator and the daycare name will not be mentioned at any time.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, including before or during the classroom observations. If I choose to withdraw I may do so by contacting either the researcher or the researcher's supervisor.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5, tel.:613-562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I can keep.

Parent/Guardian's Name _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Date: _____

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any questions or concerns:

Thank you for your participation.

Amy Parsons
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa
145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier
Ottawa, On
K1N 6N5

Dr. David Paré
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa
145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier
Ottawa, ON
K1N 6N5

Mail a summary of the results to: _____

Appendix F
Interview Guide

Interview One

A) Demographic Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Languages Spoken:

Country of Origin:

ECE Training Received (CEGEP):

Length of Program:

Year Graduated:

Other ECE Training Received:

Years of Teaching Experience:

Age-Level Worked with:

Current Position:

B) Interview Questions

- 2) What does the word play mean to you?
- 3) What are your ideas about play?
- 4) What are your feelings about play?
- 5) What does play entail?
- 6) What are your beliefs about play?
- 7) Do you have any childhood play memories?
- 8) Can you tell me about what you remember doing as a child?
- 9) Did your play change as you got older?
- 10) Who did you play with?
- 11) What kind of play were you engaged in?
- 12) Have these memories impacted your beliefs about play today? How?
- 13) What are your experiences of play in your formal training? How can you explain them?
- 14) What components of play were included in your training?
- 15) Were you exposed to any play theories in your ECE training? Can you tell me about them?
- 16) Tell me how you made meaning of these theories?
- 17) Tell me about your training program?
- 18) What were your thoughts/beliefs about play prior to your training?
- 19) Have your thoughts/beliefs shifted or changed since your formal training?
- 20) Have your ideas, beliefs developed since your training?
- 21) How have you made sense of your training? Has your training affected your practice?
- 22) Do you recall learning about any play strategies in your training? Can you tell me about them?
- 23) Have you tried to incorporate these strategies into your classroom practices?
- 24) Can you share with me how you bring play into the classroom?
- 25) Do you practice play in the classroom? Can you talk to me about the play?
- 26) Do you think/believe play contributes to a child's development? In what ways?
- 27) What types of play do you encourage? How do you decide how to promote play?

- 28) Do you have a role in the children's play?
- 29) Tell me about you own beliefs about play and play practice?

Probes:

- 1) Can you tell me more?
- 2) Why do you feel that way?
- 3) Could you explain further?
- 4) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview Two

The interview questions for the second interview will be developed based on each teacher's classroom experiences. Since the interviews will be assisted by video-recall of actual play in the classroom the questions will emerge over the course of data collection.

However, the questions will also stem from the teachers' responses to the first interview. Hence, I will ask questions related to what we see on the videotaped classroom process.

For example, can you tell me about what you see happening here?

What are the children doing here?

What was your role in the play?

What made you decide to set out that activity?

Appendix G
Data Collection Schedule

Teacher	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four	Week Five	Week Six
Teacher 1 (Teacher 1 & 2 same daycare)	Interview	Class observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall
Teacher 2	Interview	Class Observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall
Teacher 3 (Teacher 3 & 4 same daycare)	Interview	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall
Teacher 4	Interview	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall
Teacher 5 (Teacher 5 & 6 same daycare)	Interview	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall
Teacher 6	Interview	Class Observation on Thursday	Class Observation on Tuesday	Class Observation on Wednesday	Class Observation on Thursday	Interview Assisted with Video-recall

Appendix H
Partial Transcripts

Name: J Interview: 1

Interviewer: I

I: Ok, so this is the interview with E, and it is October 25th, at quarter to 1:45 pm, ok, so we'll start. Your name,

J: My name is E

I: Ok, and your age?

J: 24

I: Ok. These are just basic questions. What language do you speak?

J: I speak Greek, French, English and a bit of Italian.

I: I would love to speak all those languages.

J: But those three, and Italian

I: Oh wow. Ok, country of origin?

J: Canada {mumbles something}

I: Ok. So you're Greek, ok. And religion?

J: Greek Orthodox

I: Ok. And what early childhood training have you had or what's your background?

J: I have a BA from McGill, I graduated in 2004, and le Ministère de la Famille

I: Yes

J: Umm, made a new law that for those who have a BA in psychology or in Education are required to take, initially it was two courses.

J: Umm, the BA was 4 years.

I: Okay, 4 years. And, the courses, how long are they, a semester?

J: It's a semester. I was taking 3 or 4 courses per semester.

I: Okay.

J: I took a lot of, it was {mumbles something}, child development, and abnormal, pathological.

I: Okay. Mmm, one of my friends did that as well and she really liked it. Thought it was really interesting. And, besides that, what other training or childhood training have you had?

J: Oh, well I was trained in first aid.

I: And, years of experience working with children?

J: I've always volunteered with children. I worked at the children's hospital. At the Greek school, because we used to go to Greek school every Saturday. So, {mumbles something}. Cuz I did my cegep, going back a few years, I did my DEC in ECE and we had to do a profile which was a child studies profile. So, in that profile we were introduced to child psychology, we were introduced to children's activities and the psychology of children and all that. And, we had to do volunteer work.

I: Okay. Oh, that's interesting.

J: So I went to the children's hospital and did some volunteer work. I went to elementary school, where I used to help two of the children after school hours.

I: Alright.

J: But still, a lot of, I used to baby-sit as a teenager. Some people don't consider that as training but it's the first...

I: Step in many. And so, what age groups have you worked with, in terms of children?

J: I would say from 3 to 7.

INTERVIEW WITH A

Perfect, ok, Thursday, November 3rd, and {} A. Can I have your full name please?

A:

I: Ok. Age?

A: 31.

I: Ok, language spoken or languages spoken?

A: Primarily English,

I: Ok

A: Some Spanish.

I: Ok. Very nice

A: And a little bit of sign language.

I: Ah, cool. I need, I would love to learn, I never learned it.

A: I only know what I picked up over the years. I haven't specially {} I can't like carry a conversation, but I can ask somebody {}

I: No, but that's important.

A: Yeah.

I: It's a crucial need to know. You know, the basic elements?

A: Yeah.

I: Uh, country of origin?

A: Canadian.

I: Ok. Race, blood, ethnicity?

A: Well, my dad's from South America, and my mom's British.

I: Ok.

A: Hispanic, Anglo

I: Ok, works for me.

A: Caucasian I guess

I: Ok. Religion?

A: None.

I: Ok. Oh wait, early childhood training. Where did you get your training?

A: Vanier,

I: Ok

A: Continuing education, {} attestation

I: Ok, the length of the program?

A: You do it at your own pace. I did it full time, so I did it in two and a half years.

I: Ok. Alright, and you graduated in what year?

A: 2005.

I: Ok. And have you received any other training prior to or after?

A: In early childhood

I: Yeah.

A: Specifically, no, I have a Bachelor's in History with a minor in English.

I: That's nice

A: The {} for children, music for children, literature for children, and I forget the title, but something about {} gymnastics

I: Ok. Alright. That must have been interesting, especially with children's literature.

A: that was amazing.

I: Of course, very interesting. Definitely. I'm a big, I love books.

A: I love, I mean, my mom laughs because I always, you know, my brother works for a book company, so I come home {}

- I: {?} [laughs] children's book. Ok, years of teaching experience?
- A: This is my 12th year.
- I: Ok. And, the ages, age range of children you've worked with?
- A: I've done everything from 18 months to
- I: ok
- A: to 36.
- I: Ok
- A: The main focus I did has been 3-5
- I: Current position?
- A: Educator,
- I: yes
- A: with 4 and 5 year olds.
- I: Ok. And how long have you been
- A: This is my fourth year here.
- I: Ok. Perfect, alright. Now we'll start the questions related to your perceptions and beliefs. So my first question is what does the word play mean to you?
- A: Well, probably {?} it helps them learn, it's how they live their lives. I really believe people need to have fun, start playing, every moment of every day is a learning opportunity.
- I: Well said. And what are your feelings about play?
- A: That it's fun.
- I: Ok.
- A: I like to have fun, I like to introduce kids to new things. I want them to be curious cause I'm curious. There's gotta be questions. With every new situation, I want them to know that they have the right to ask any questions and that they deserve an answer.
- I: Ok. And what do you think play entails?
- A: Everything.
- I: Ok
- A: I mean, they can be playing with blocks, or they can be putting their shoes on, you know? And trying to match up the folds in a fun way. Or you know, drawing with markers on your fingers, and making funny faces,
- I: yeah I love that.
- A: Or cooking, or getting ready for bed, or washing up for dinner
- I: So play entails everything?
- A: Yeah.
- I: Ok. Ok, now this I'm gonna ask you to go back a few years.
- A: Ok
- I: What are your memories of play as a child. What kind of activities do you remember doing, what stands out, is there something a strong memory that you have?
- A: Before the age of five, my parents traveled a lot, so we didn't have a lot of toys, so there was a lot of going to the park, well outside. That's the most important. We were always in a different country, so like, playing at the beach, or playing in the mountains, or playing in someone's backyard. So I didn't really have, I never went to a daycare type place. Or given situation. I don't really have any memories of playing with legos or whatever.
- I: Ok.
- A: What stands out is that we were always outside and basically had to amuse ourselves.
- I: Ok.

A: And after the age of five, like I was really into dry, cause again, once my parents had settled us down a bit more, we still didn't have a lot of toys. We didn't have my little pony or barbie

I: Or anything like that

A: Right, exactly. Like there were pencil crayons, and paint, certainly more creative.

I: Ok. Alright, and how about, how did your play change when you entered adolescence?

A: Sports.

I: Ok.

A: I liked sports.

I: Ok.

A: Yeah.

I: Anything in particular, maybe that you really enjoyed?

A: What I enjoyed the most was swimming

I: Ok

A: Cause I didn't have to be {?}

I: Ok

A: Tennis and volleyball. Like group sports.

I: Ok. Group sports then.

A: Yeah.

I: And were you a member of a team, or was it just,

A: In highschool yeah. I was on the volleyball team, basketball team, tennis team,

I: Alright, ok. You were {?}

A: I was, I was. And not fun, but playing piano.

I: Ok, and was that your choice or,

A: no, my parents.

I: Ok, that's why it wasn't fun.

A: Yeah

I: Ok, and what about now as an adult, do you play?

A: Well I play with the kids, yeah, for sure. I play with my dog.

I: Ok

A: Cause I don't have children yet, so I play with my doggy. And I, right now, board games, like scrabble, Cranium,

I: All that kind of, ok. Great, we'll move on to the next one, do you think your memories of play have influenced your beliefs today?

A: Yeah

I: How, how would you say

A: I think, I definitely want my kids, not just in my classroom, but in the future my own kids as well, to have the same experiences I did. I thought they were very useful. That they need to sense yourself, there's always something today, and it can always be fun, and it's always a learning opportunity. And it should be {?}

I: Ok, alright, now we'll go on to the next section. This is related to your training. What were your thoughts on play before you did your program at Vanier?

A: Pretty much what they are now

I: Ok.

A: You can, by playing you're exploring, and by exploring you're learning.

I: Ok.

A: Pretty much

List of Tables

Table 1 Educators' Daily Schedules

Adrienne 4-5 year old classroom

Time of Day	Activity
7-9 am	Arrival, greeting, large group setting and free play (all areas opened)
9:15 -9:30	Clean up, back in classrooms, wash hands
9:30-9:45	Snack
9:45-10:15	Large group time (circle time, story, songs, movement, flannel board, puppets) Educator sets out one-two new activities related to interest of the group (daily promoting different developmental domains I.e. social, emotional, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language)
10:15-11:15	Free play
11:15-11:20	Clean up and dress for outdoor play
11:20-12:20	Outdoor play
12:30	Hand washing, lunch
1:00	Quiet time on beds with book (or animated story on CD player)
1:00 to 3:00	Nap time
3:00 to 3:30	Wake up and snack time
3:45 to 6:00	Free play (all areas opened)/Outdoor play

Time Allotted for Play: Indoor 5 hours and 15 minutes; Outdoors 1 hour

Table 2 Educators' Daily Schedules

Ellen's Daily Schedule for 3 year olds

Time of Day	Activity
7-9:00 am	Arrival, greeting, large group setting in the gym and free play (books, puzzles, blocks, costumes, motor room toys balls, balance beams)
9:00-9:10	Clean up, back in classrooms, wash hands
9:10-9:30	Snack
9:40-10:00	Large group time (circle time, story, songs, movement, flannel board stories, puppets)
10:00-11:00	Free play Educator sets out new activities related to group interests (daily promoting different developmental domains I.e. social, emotional, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language) All areas open
11:00-11:10	Clean up and dress for outdoor play
11:10-12:10	Outdoor play
12:10	Hand washing, lunch
12:40	Quiet time on beds with book or animated story (on CD player)
1:00 to 3:00	Nap time
3:00 to 3:30	Wake up and snack time
3:45 to 6:00	Free play (all areas opened)

Time Allotted for play: 5 hours 15 minutes, Outdoor: 50 minutes

Table 3 Educators' Daily Schedules

Melena's Daily Schedule for 2 to 3 year olds

Time of Day	Activity
7-8:55 am	Arrival, greeting, large group setting in the motricity room and free play (books, puzzles, blocks, costumes, motor room toys balls, balance beams, cars, trucks)
8:55-9:00	Clean up, back in classrooms, wash hands
9:00-9:20	Snack
9:20-9:40	Large group time (circle time, story, songs, movement, flannel board stories, puppets)
9:40-10:40	Free play Educator sets out new activities related to group interests (daily promoting different developmental domains I.e. social, emotional, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language) All areas open
10:40-10:50	Clean up and dress for outdoor play
10:50-11:50	Outdoor play
11:50-12:30	Hand washing, lunch,
12:40	Quiet time on beds with book or animated story (on CD player)
1:00 to 3:00	Nap time
3:00 to 3:30	Wake up and snack time
3:45 to 6:00	Free play (all areas opened)/ Outdoor if weather permits

Time allotted for play: Indoors 5 hours and 10 minutes, Outdoor: 1 hour

Table 4 Educators' Daily Schedules

Tania's Daily Schedule for 4 to 5 year olds

Time of Day	Activity
7-9 am	Arrival, greeting, large group setting and free play in the 4 year old classroom (all areas opened)
9:15 -9:30	Clean up, wash hands
9:30-9:45	Snack
9:45-10:15	Large group time (circle time, story, songs, movement, flannel board, puppets) Children are asked to choose 3 play areas for free play time on the planning board
10:15-11:15	Free play Educator sets out one-two new activities related to interest of the group (daily promoting different developmental domains I.e. social, emotional, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language)
11:15-11:20	Clean up and dress for outdoor play
11:20-12:10	Outdoor play
12:10	Hand washing, lunch
12:40	Quiet time on beds with book (or animated story on CD player)
1:00 to 3:00	Nap time
3:00 to 3:30	Wake up and snack time
3:45 to 6:00	Free play (all areas opened)/ Outdoor if weather permits

Time allotted for play: Indoor 5 hours 15 minutes; Outdoor minimum 50 minutes