A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM PLAY FOR
UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLCHILDREN

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the spontaneous play of children in upper elementary school. Although play has been given a major role in preschool education and although it has been credited with providing a number of essential contributions to a child’s upbringing, it has never gained a foothold in elementary school. The reasons for its absence as well as a definition of play are among the subjects of the first chapter.

The vast bulk of the data was collected in a large, multi-ethnic school in North York, Ontario from September of 1995 to June of 1996. In order to conduct this research, I adopted a qualitative methodology since I not only wanted to gain an understanding of the program but I also wanted to see how the participants, namely the students, felt about their play. One of the major values of this study, in fact, lies with the role of the children who themselves contributed to the data collection by providing written documentation of their participation in the play episodes. In this respect this research study is unique since it not only chronicles the role of play within an elementary school classroom but, as well, it does so in large measure through the eyes of the children rather than just an adult observer.

Through the constant comparison method I was able to discern thirteen themes some of which discuss the effects of play upon E.S.L. children, students with learning difficulties, and the classroom climate. In an effort to contextualize the data I chose a holistic education framework since I found that its philosophy and practices could
embrace play into the curriculum. I conclude my thesis with a discussion of the significance of the study and I present arguments outlining why play should be included in the elementary school curriculum.

Lastly, I allow myself some personal reflections which relate the effects of this study on myself as both a researcher and teacher.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Play is the most complete of all the educational processes for it influences the intellect, the emotions and the body of the child.
(Scarfe, 1962, p. 119)

This study is concerned with the study of classroom play for children in the upper elementary school. Traditionally, children's play has been studied within the domain of early childhood education. There has been very little documentation for the use of play with children who are in the Junior Division since elementary school is generally concerned with academic achievement which cannot be easily measured through play. Moreover, play has never received the status and respect which would allow for its inclusion within the school curriculum. Many teachers, administrators, and parents do not understand the meaning of play and its many implications, including its impact on children. In contrast to early childhood education which is governed by child development principles and which, consequently, utilizes play as part of its curriculum, elementary schools gradually limit the amount of play to the extent that, by Grade 4, play has either been banished to the playground at recess or it has been restricted to those children who have completed their work.

Nevertheless, if we believe that education involves more than just a measure of academic achievement, then there is justification for the use of play throughout elementary school. In this thesis I explore the following three questions in an effort to justify the use and value of play in elementary schools:

1. What are the impacts of play on schoolchildren in the Junior Division?
2. How do the children themselves feel about their play?
3. Should we incorporate play in the curriculum for children in the upper elementary grades?

This study is unique for two reasons. Since there has been very little study of play within the elementary schools, this investigation lays the groundwork for future research in the area of play with older children. In this sense, then, this dissertation contributes academic knowledge to an area of study which has previously been ignored. Secondly, since the study of play has been confined to early childhood education, research has of necessity had to rely upon the observations of adult researchers to collect and analyze the data. In this present study the children themselves acted as collaborators in the data collection by furnishing their own written reports about their play. Hence, the perspective of this study is much closer to the reality of the play context than are other studies which have been conducted solely through the eyes of adult observers.

In the following chapter I discuss the rationale for this study from both a personal and a historical reference point. To avoid confusion about the meaning of play, I also define play according to the findings of previous research. Finally, I will point out in further depth why this research is significant in terms of its implications for future research and its uniqueness in the study of children.

Rationale for the Study

The choice of topic for this thesis, namely “A Qualitative Analysis of Classroom Play for Upper Elementary Schoolchildren” was originally inspired by my desire to become a play therapist. I thought that by understanding play I would have greater insight when it came to applying it in a clinical setting. For that reason I set about trying
to learn as much as possible about children’s play. Beginning with my qualifying research paper to gain acceptance into the doctoral programme and extending into my choice of courses, I set out to learn the meaning of play, its role in the education of children, and its value in shaping the lives of young people. It soon became apparent that when one discussed play and its place in education, one was invariably speaking of early childhood education. It seemed that there was little connection between play and elementary school students who were nine to eleven years old which was the age group of children I was then teaching.

It was at this point that I began to have doubts about the philosophical position I had held for a dozen or more years. I had come to believe that the methods and pedagogy I had employed, namely a hands-on approach to learning and an active learning mode under the guidance of a firm, benevolent teacher, were in the best interests of children. However, for a number of reasons I now began to question not only my own teaching practices but also those of the teaching profession. The emphasis in one of my courses at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, namely, Play and Education, compelled me to examine my own teaching practices and philosophy both of which I had been led to believe were admirable, if not exemplary. My doubts were further confirmed when I leafed through an article entitled, “Developing A Research Agenda for Early Childhood Education: What Can Be Learned from the Research on Teaching?” in an issue of the Early Childhood Research Quarterly. In this report the author points out that the schools’ primary concern is with achievement whereas early childhood education is predicated upon child development (Goffin, 1989, p. 191). For this reason the play in which young children have been allowed to engage is reduced upon their entry into elementary school. Before long, children are weaned off play to the point at which it has practically vanished by the time they enter the Junior Division.
Yet I wondered if the needs and characteristics of children between early childhood and the elementary years were really so very different. In many respects the answer is, of course, yes. Children have evolved from what Piaget termed the preoperational stage of development through the stage of concrete operations so that by Grade 5 they are entering upon the threshold of formal operations. Thus, they have evolved from small, egocentric, pretend-playing toddlers, who are just beginning to communicate through the acquisition of language, to larger, social creatures who are now motorically adept and cognitively advanced. Despite this transformation, however, children of the ages between seven and eleven years and even older still need to be active, to interact with their peers, to satisfy their curiosity, and to develop their self-esteem. If play is deemed to fulfil these requirements of young children why, I wondered, can it not do the same for older children as well? The answer has much to do, as Goffin implies, with the divergent philosophies of early childhood and elementary school education. In quoting E. Jones (1986), Goffin contends: “Early childhood is really the only level of education that has taken development principles seriously and developed criteria and procedures for active learning” (1989, p. 191). Moreover, Goffin argues:

... the exclusion of play is a philosophical decision that reflects schools’ emphasis on achievement. Conversely, the dominance of play and constructive activity in traditional early childhood classrooms reflect early childhood’s respect for child development and the value of individuality, personal competence and learner activity. (p. 195)

The author goes on to say that in contrast to early education which has “tended to rely on psychological theory and philosophical beliefs as a basis for its decisions on teaching” (p. 196), elementary schools have relied “upon carefully structured, hierarchical learning” (p. 198).
Indeed, a look back at the history of education in Ontario indicates that the predominant factor governing elementary schools during the first half of this century was the acquisition of knowledge by traditional teaching methods. This practice invariably involved the teacher standing at the front of a classroom where students were seated in rows, forbidden to speak unless called upon, and instructed to learn by rote. Promotion was determined by the marks achieved by pupils.

Eventually this mechanistic, traditional teaching style gave way to what might be called a Socratic mode. With this change, a priority was given to a child’s acquisition of a set of skills which could be attained in a slightly more humane fashion through the skill of a teacher who would try to draw out students’ abilities through a series of challenging questions. Whereas the traditional classroom stressed memorization and order, the Socratic method allowed for discussion and some slightly increased freedom for the child. Yet in both kinds of classes, the “teacher continued to be the central figure in the teaching-learning process” (Hall and Dennis, 1968, p. 122).

With the publication of Living and Learning in 1968, however, teaching came to take on quite a different meaning. No longer were the acquisition of knowledge and the attainment of skills the sole concerns of the school. Now the school was to provide for the needs of the whole child, that is, the social, physical, and emotional domains of the student as well as the academic achievement of the child. As the authors of this prescription for learning put it: “The interests and needs of the individual child are becoming to an increasing degree the basis of the curriculum. Concern for physical, social, moral, spiritual and emotional development has been added to the school’s traditional interest in academic planning” (p. 123). Furthermore, Hall and Dennis continued, it was “the responsibility of every school authority to provide a child-centred learning continuum that invited learning by individual discovery and inquiry” (p. 179). But what came to be known as child-centred learning was really a misnomer. Even
though teachers did begin to allow greater flexibility and a more humane approach in many cases, child-centred schooling never really became the predominant mode of instruction in Ontario elementary schools despite many press reports to the contrary. Teachers were still concerned with maintaining control and leading their students towards the acquisition of skills and content which they, that is, the teachers, deemed important. Children may have been granted some degree of choice as to the activities they could perform but they were restricted to those which were arranged, designed, and ultimately controlled by the teacher.

At the same time, attention was also to be afforded to the social, emotional and physical domains of children. To facilitate the development of the “whole child,” classrooms which allowed for openness were encouraged. But the breaking down of walls between classrooms and the formation of “pods” which housed several classes did not succeed in the formation of the “open classroom” as someone of the school of Herbert Kohl (1970) and John Holt (1967) had envisaged. Instead of a democratic climate, an individualized curriculum, and an emphasis on the whole child, schools were still dominated by teachers’ decisions, a curriculum which expected children to attain standardized levels all at the same time, and a continuance of the weight given to academic learning. This is not to say that some programs did not try to introduce some progressive measures including a decrease in testing and a more hands-on approach to learning than the traditional pencil-to-paper tasks had allowed. But for several reasons, schools rarely went as far as Hall and Dennis had advocated. In the first place, teachers were ill-prepared for the changes which had been suggested. Many teachers who had been schooled in the traditional manner found it difficult to cope with such a fundamental difference in educational philosophies. Others were concerned with relinquishing control. Some, such as myself, were caught between wanting to implement the suggestions and yet not fully comprehending how such a
shift needed to take place.

Furthermore, the fabric of society, at least as far as major urban centres were concerned, was being altered dramatically. The influx of immigrants led to tremendous numbers of E.S.L. (English as a Second Language) children who had neither the background nor the language to contend with the proposed changes. With increased inflation and the higher cost of living, both parents in many families were obliged to work. A higher divorce rate also meant greater pressures on families and children. Despite these societal changes, however, schools never really abandoned the philosophical framework which they had inherited. Yet, by introducing some of the new changes such as physically open classrooms and experimenting with different curriculum measures such as a decrease in drill and rote exercises, schools were caught in a state of transition. They had neither succeeded in implementing the child-centred approach to learning supported by the authors of Living and Learning nor had they maintained the rigid academic standards established by their predecessors. Hence, schools hastily abandoned their quasi-experiment with child-centred learning as quickly as it took them to rebuild the walls between classrooms.

Today education may be undergoing greater scrutiny than ever before. Editorials disparage our school system for the alleged decline in student achievement, the high drop-out rate among secondary school students, and an ever-increasing amount of illiteracy. Much of the blame, so critics say, is due to a school system which has eschewed traditional learning for child-centred education. Although there have been some modest attempts to involve students in their learning, the vast majority of teachers never allowed children to be “primarily responsible for the learning process” (Clayton, 1996, p. D3) as some individuals would have us believe. What these critics fail to understand is that it is misleading to think that child-centred education is the norm in Ontario’s schools. Few classrooms went so far as installing a truly child-
centred learning environment although many did try to include elements of progressive education such as a reduction of standardized testing, greater use of concrete materials, and a decrease in paper and pencil tasks. The public's misunderstanding of the school system is reflected in the debate about the use of "whole language." Whole language is a form of literacy instruction, but it also represents a philosophy which is more humane, more trusting, and more hopeful than the dogmas of the past. In condemning schools for the fact that children do not seem to be graduating with the same degree of skills that previous generations had achieved, critics of child-centred schools are also quick to attack whole language for its failure to employ phonics. They do not understand that teachers of whole language also employ phonics instruction to facilitate reading acquisition but it is used judiciously and as only one of several methods to teach reading. This lack of public perception concerning reading is akin to the misunderstandings about child-centred learning, which, in itself, incorporates whole language into its philosophy.

The question of method, however, is not really the one which we need to address. Rather what we should be asking ourselves is, what do we want our school system to provide? Do we simply want to supply children with the academic tools, information, and requisite skills needed to secure a successful job upon graduation as traditional education aimed to do (Erikson, 1963, p. 212)? Should we return to a traditional form of education which no less an authority than Albert Einstein claimed was "uninteresting, unmotivating and therefore unsuccessful in stimulating curiosity" (as cited in Henniger, 1987, p. 169)? Do we revert to a philosophy of education which has as its goal the transmission of information and the imposition of rules on children (Erikson, p. 212)? Or should we adopt a more progressive philosophy; one which has as its goal the development of intelligence which is accomplished by helping children "learn how to learn" (Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, 1986, p.
and which addresses the needs of the whole child by attending not just to her academic needs but to her social, emotional, and physical requirements as well? Although the present political climate seems to advocate a return to traditional education epitomized by the clamour for standardized testing, many educators still seem to endorse a system which supports the interests of the whole child. If this is indeed the route we take, we must find the means to advance risk-taking, encourage discovery, ensure success, and foster self-esteem. At the same time we must promote a love of learning and an attitude which will endear the child to school.

According to many child development experts, one of the methods which can facilitate the attainment of these lofty goals is play. As Hall and Dennis reported:

Children need to play. Despite the belief held by many adults that learning must be painful and serious, it is the joy and pleasure of play which often sets the stage for learning. Play provides a psychological safety zone in which children can test their competence without fear of failure. It is out of play that children develop rules of a game and a sense of order . . . teachers aware of the learning process should not feel guilty about the fun and noisy atmosphere that may be engendered. (1968, p.57)

Play, then, has "a central role in achieving [a] balance" (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988, p. 138) among the cognitive, physical, and affective areas of development.

The contributions of play to a child's development will be examined at length in the review of the literature, but suffice it to say at this point that play benefits the child in a number of ways. First, it provides children with a sense of control that they rarely feel during the course of the school day, dominated as it is by the demands of the curriculum as interpreted and administered by the teacher. Secondly, play allows children to enjoy themselves and, thus, it helps to promote a sentiment in which “going

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1 To avoid both sexist language and awkward constructions, I have used feminine pronouns when referring to a child and masculine pronouns to refer to a teacher.
to school will be a pleasing experience” (Hall and Dennis, 1968, p. 14). The positive attitude that is generated will encourage the child to learn and to be successful in school. Thirdly, play gives children opportunities for physical development which they would otherwise not enjoy since they spend so much of their time confined “unnaturally in seats” (King, as cited in Perlmutter & Burrell, 1995, p. 20). At play, children have the opportunity to move around and in many instances they are able to develop their fine motor abilities through activities such as painting, building, and the use of plasticine. Play encourages risk-taking since its outcome will not necessarily result in negative consequences if it does not happen to be correct. In fact, it creates opportunities for outcomes that are neither right nor wrong. Most school work, on the other hand, is measured for its accuracy or appearance.

By learning to take risks, children engage in divergent, creative thinking which they need to develop their intelligence. By taking risks, children will teach themselves since they will not be afraid to engage in trial and error. Play acts as an emotional outlet for much of the anger and frustration which they harbour inside themselves. Since the expression of hostility is difficult to tolerate within a classroom environment, there must be an avenue to release this anger. Play is a medium through which this anger can be released and perhaps even channelled into a creative statement. Play facilitates cooperation among children. Through play, children learn to take turns, share materials, and appreciate other perspectives. Play facilitates the transition from egocentrism to socialization and, in doing so we are told, “cooperation can reach its highest level” (Day, 1980, p. 64).

Play can alter the perception that children have of adults. It can engender a shift in a relationship between pupil and teacher that is often suspicious and untrusting to one in which children look on their teacher as a caring, humane, accepting person. By allowing children to engage in play and by demonstrating a sense of playfulness
themselves, teachers can enter into an association with their students which they would otherwise not be able to do. Play can be a valuable activity for teachers because it provides them with the opportunity to observe children and assess their development in areas such as social interaction, communication, and leadership qualities. It also allows teachers to discover interests and abilities of the child which may not be evident during the regular school regimen. Thus, "play is a context in which the teacher can see what a child can do" (Perlmutter & Burrell, p. 20). Lastly, play furnishes the child with a seriousness of purpose which she may not be able to acquire through any other means. One only has to watch a child assemble a puzzle, paint a picture, or shape a piece of plasticine to see that play is "serious business" (Weininger, 1979, p. 26). It is this seriousness of purpose according to Day that "gives play its educational value" (1980, p. 60).

Yet, despite the accolades attributable to play, by the time children have reached the junior grades, play has all but disappeared from the school day. Even "in many primary classrooms, recess is the only officially sanctioned, voluntary play left for children" (Perlmutter & Burrell, 1995, p. 15). Although some teachers may try to inject some form of playful activity to arouse interest and enthusiasm, the kind of play which children were allowed to participate in during their preschool years is no longer present. As I have already mentioned, the absence of play has much to do with the fact that whereas early childhood education is based predominantly on child development, the schools look to achievement as their rationale. If play does occur, it is likely to be used as a reward for those children who have completed their work. As Weininger puts it, "Western society seems to have a tradition of saying that it is all right to play once the children's work has been finished. It is not all right to play until children have done what we consider important for them to do" (1982, p. 131).

The increasing scarcity of play in the primary division and its total absence from
the junior grades is a result of the schools' preoccupation with achievement and the pressures imposed upon teachers to be accountable for every minute of the school day. But even without the recent clamour over the failure of our schools, play has always received short shrift by the elementary panel for several reasons. First, parents and some educators do not hold play in high esteem. They seem to think of it as a frill or as an activity with limited value whose sole purpose is "the release of excess energy" (Day, 1980, p.60). This disparagement with respect to education is consistent with the view held by society about play, namely, that it is "an activity transpiring mainly under surplus situations" (Saracho, 1991, p.59). Even some teachers of early childhood education do not seem comfortable with play. Despite research data which indicate that play is "conducive to academic learning and young children's development, teachers continue to select a skills-oriented program" (Saracho, p.59). Perhaps they are wary of a form of learning which does not always yield discernible results. Play, after all, is not measurable in the same way that standardized tests can be assessed. Young teachers, in particular, may be cautious about instituting play because it may mean an apparent loss of control. In elementary schools where support and understanding may not be forthcoming from the administration, some young teachers may feel intimidated by other teachers whose classrooms are noted for their semblance of order and quiet. Some other teachers may find it difficult to cope with the increase in noise which inevitably accompanies play. Still others might feel uncomfortable with play because they have not been adequately schooled in the role of play within education by their teacher-training institution. I, for instance, never received any grounding in play from my teachers' college and, though there may be a small degree of attention given to school play today, "teacher education programs rarely prepare teachers to use strategies that promote children's play" (Saracho, p. 59).
Even though schools are faced with greater pressure to achieve and account for their results than ever before, the absence of play is still somewhat of an ironic phenomenon given the state of today’s child. In today’s world many children do not grow up with the healthy, carefree sense of play experienced by preceding generations. This is attributable to several factors. Children of low economic status who live in apartment dwellings and whose parent or parents may be working, do not have the occasion to play that the children of yesteryear did. Rather than engaging in self-directed play with their peers, many children turn to television as their source of recreation. Others who come from more affluent backgrounds are often channelled into leagues of organized sports where competition is championed. The resulting lack of “down time” for many children who come from very busy families is one of the causes of the stress which affects many Canadian children (Gadd, 1996, p. A1). Hence, children do not have the opportunities for self-directed play in which they decide for themselves what it is they want to do. Such opportunities might serve as an antidote to the rushed, hurried upbringing which has resulted in what various child development experts have labelled “the disappearance of childhood” (Wassermann, 1992, p. 133). No longer do children today have the chance or time to:

... live in the life of the mind, to be playful, to behave as children. In place of the traditional childhood games that were still popular a generation ago, in place of fantasy and make-believe, in place of messing around, today’s children have substituted television. Today, children play computer games in the amusement arcade and Nintendo at home, instead of messing around with coloured paper and junk. (Wassermann, p.133)

The overriding concern with achievement and the alleged failure to provide a proper education are only exacerbating what has become a manufactured crisis in our schools. Yes, children need and deserve an education which prepares them for
future success and, in order to achieve this, they require a solid grounding in the basics and a certain amount of information which will allow them to meet the needs of a society which seems to grow leaner and somewhat meaner as we approach the millennium. At the same time, however, children must have a healthy childhood, one which enables them not only to learn, but to play as well. Only then will a child grow into an adult who can work well (Erickson, R. J., 1985, p.261). The importance of children's play to the development of a healthy adult is alluded to in a study of animals by Stuart Brown where he concludes that “play may be as important to life - for us and for other animals as sleeping and dreaming. Play is key to an individual's development and to its social relationship and status” (1994, p. 8). To lend weight to his argument, Brown refers to a study of 26 convicted murderers in the state of Texas, 90 percent of whom reported either an absence of play as children or abnormal play in the form of bullying, sadism, or cruelty to animals. He thus maintains that play is a “powerful, positive force” which is essential to a child's upbringing and development into a healthy, well-adjusted adult (p. 12).

The Definition of Play

Originally, I set out in my preliminary investigation of children's play with the intention of exploring its connections to social, emotional, and academic growth. I felt that I could make a significant contribution to research about play if I could observe direct results in these three domains from children's participation in play activities. As Krasnor and Pepler have stated:

Grandiose claims for the global benefit of play have been made repeatedly in the applied literature; few have been substantiated by research . . . it has thus been exceedingly difficult to show that free play per se has a causal function in
cognitive and social development. (1980, p. 92)

For this reason I tried to establish links between the free play activities which I had designed in the classroom and the academic curriculum. As time progressed however, I found myself perplexed and frustrated by my efforts to steer the children in directions which would enhance their academic progress. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that I did not know how to ask the appropriate questions which would link the children's play with the curriculum. Moreover, I realized that in my attempts to connect the children's play with what I was supposed to teach, I was losing sight of what they had been doing. I was, in effect, demeaning their play because I was so preoccupied with the notion that play had to lead to other forms of learning. As well, I felt that I was contradicting the definition of play as it has been interpreted in the literature.

Unless one is absolutely clear about the meaning of play there is the danger that this discussion will be misunderstood because of a lack of consensus as to what exactly constitutes play. Therefore, it is necessary at this point to try to clarify just what it is we intend when we use the word play. The following comments by several Grade 5 students who participated as subjects in the study give us some insight into its definition:

“Activities are good because you are free.”

“I play basketball for fun because you will be under pressure if you just want to win.”

“When me and Mary have free time we play S.O.S. at school time so we could relax a little not just work . . . Me and Mary play tic-tac-toe at school. I win most of the time but we still have a lot of fun that counts a lot more. . . . That's what play means to me just have fun.”

“Play means to me you do no work just play.”

“To have fun to get rid of pressure.”
“You have fun naturally.”

“Play means to do something in an active way.”

The most common criterion of play listed in the opinions of these children is that play is fun. This is consistent with one of the characteristics of play that Catherine Garvey outlined in Donmoyer (1981), namely that play is pleasurable. If an activity is fun, a child will be intrinsically motivated to carry on with it, not because the play will result in an external reward either in the form of praise or grades, but simply for the sheer joy of doing it. For this reason King writes that “the criterion which gradually emerges as the single most important quality differentiating between work experiences and play experiences is that of pleasure” (1987, p. 145). Thus, researchers of children’s play would seem to be justified in concluding that play is first and foremost an enjoyable activity which “is motivated by internal drives” (Day, 1980, p. 59) and occurring for its own sake. A child enters a play activity because of the satisfaction embedded in that activity (Saracho, 1991, p. 47). This criterion then is consistent with the first of the six characteristics of play that Rubin and his associates listed in their study of 1983 (as cited in Saracho, p. 47) when they said that play consisted of the following:

1. intrinsic motivation
2. concern with activities rather than goals
3. control of the activity by the children themselves
4. non-literal
5. freedom from externally imposed rules
6. active participation

Secondly, play is concerned with process rather than product. In almost every instance in school the children are evaluated on the basis of their performance on any particular assignment. During play, however, the participants need not concern
themselves with the finished product because the only person they have to please is themselves. Whether or not the children continue with the play depends on the inner satisfaction they feel from actually doing the activity. Perhaps it is this characteristic of play which the subjects allude to in their comments when they talk about “relax[ing] a little” and “having fun [without] pressure.”

To clarify what is meant by the third characteristic of play described above, it may be helpful to think of two children who are painting on opposite sides of an easel. An observer who is not familiar with the classroom may interpret the activities of both children as play while someone else might see them as work. King tells us that the distinction lies in “the context of the activities, not on the content of the activities themselves” (1987, p.160). Or as Bernard Spodek and Olivia Saracho put it, “it is not the activity, but the reasons for the activity, that seem to determine whether it is play or work” (1988, p.11). For instance, the child who is working is painting a picture of her favourite scene of a novel she has read in class and is pursuing a follow-up activity to a list of alternatives provided by the teacher. On the other hand, the child who is playing has chosen to paint because it was her choice, not her teacher’s. Furthermore, the subject of the painting was inspired from the child’s own imagination rather than from the content of a book. As previously mentioned, the girl who is working is concerned with producing something which will earn her approval and praise from her teacher. The girl who is playing may also want to create something pleasing to the eye but her satisfaction stems from the activity itself and the sense of enjoyment she gains from doing rather than achieving.

For these reasons Saracho maintains that participants in play are concerned with activities where goals are self-imposed and where the behavior of the players is spontaneous (1991, p. 47). In this sense the play opportunities which were offered to the subjects of this study need to be distinguished from the instrumental play which

King defines instrumental play as “activities organized by the teacher but which older elementary school children label play if they enjoy participating” (1987, p. 146). She maintains that “children enjoy instrumental play for many different reasons. These activities may permit physical activity; they may be undemanding and require little effort; they may permit social contact among children, encourage individual expression, or include interesting content” (p. 146). But she is also quite emphatic that this instrumental play is most definitely not the spontaneous, process-oriented, child-controlled play which is the subject of this study. In her words:

Although upper elementary school children call these activities play, there are numerous differences between instrumental play activities and the spontaneous play activities usually associated with children. Most importantly instrumental play activities are not voluntary or self-directed, and they serve goals beyond the purposes of the participants. Teachers organize these activities so that playful elements are included, but the teacher maintains control of the situation and the playful elements are not permitted to obscure the academic messages. (p. 146)

Thus, the focus of this study is on spontaneous play, that is, play which is controlled by the children themselves and which is conducted for the sake of the actual activity because it is pleasurable and satisfying, and not because it will yield rewards. It is non-instrumental in the sense that it is not used as a means of reaching a curriculum goal which is the design of the teacher. To adopt such a strategy, what Saracho describes as a teacher’s redirecting style, would “unquestionably devalue the
children’s play because it is not spontaneous anymore” (p. 59).

The fourth criterion of play is that it often has a non-literal quality attached to it. Sociodramatic play is very evident in preschool and kindergarten settings but it is rarely discussed with reference to older elementary school children. One reason for this omission is that it has not been studied, since 10- and 11- year-old children are rarely afforded the opportunity to engage in spontaneous pretend play which adults can observe. One rationale for this absence is Piaget’s claim that pretend play diminishes with older children (as cited in Singer, 1973, p.19). However, in the time I have studied play in my own Grade 5 classroom, I have witnessed many instances in which children engage in fantasy play with their peers. Indeed, my own observations would tend to repudiate Piaget’s contention and instead support Jerome Singer when he states that “children between the ages of nine and thirteen indicate a considerable continuing interest in make-believe activities and fantasy games” (p. 245). Further evidence of the interest of upper elementary schoolchildren in fantasy play is also provided by the comment of one of the children involved in this study when she states “I would love to play with Barbies and dolls.”

The fifth criterion, that play be free of externally imposed rules, is problematic for elementary school children since the “predominant form of children’s play with the onset of concrete operations (i.e. ages seven to eleven) becomes the game with rules” (Rubin & Pepler, 1982, p. 293). For the purposes of this study, however, and in accordance with Corinne Hutt’s understanding of different kinds of play (as cited in Chazan, Laing & Harper, 1987, p. 56) I have also included the use of games as a component of play. The reason for the exclusion of games during a discussion of play

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2 At the same time, however, Perlmutter and Burrell tell us that the play in which the subjects of this study participated was connected to their academic learning since children were asked to report on the activity in which they were involved. In their words, “Having to plan for, record and report on play activities ties play to academic learning. . . . the frequent challenge to find a way to record what you have built or created ties naturally occurring constructive play to academic standards” (1995, p. 18). Nevertheless, it is not specifically the intention of this study to examine the contributions of children’s spontaneous play to academic learning.
is the fact that one usually associates games with sets of externally imposed rules. On the other hand, spontaneous play consists of children’s freedom to control the activity and not be constrained by the limits imposed by a formal set of rules. My observations of children’s participation in the classroom play and in the playground lead me to believe that it is possible to include games as a characteristic of play despite the fact that they are, at first glance, contradictory. The following example serves to illustrate the paradox. In a game of pick-up sticks I played against a student, the following exchange took place:

    Student: You can whack the sticks now, Mr. S.
    Teacher: What do you mean, I can whack the sticks?
    Student: You know, you can hit the pile with one of your own after you’ve picked five up.
    Teacher: No, I didn’t know that.
    Student: Oh yeah, that’s a rule we made up. Everybody in the class knows it.

In this instance, the children did not feel compelled to bind themselves to the rules of the game as laid out in the instruction manual. Instead, they simply made up their own rule to suit their needs as they saw fit. Bruno Bettelheim has accounted for this behavior by saying that children “will move back and forth from games to play” until they have gained an adequate degree of maturity and self-esteem (1972, p. 8). I have also observed similar behavior in various children with whom I have played checkers. At times children would generally follow the customary rules for the game but they would also quickly alter them if they proved too difficult to follow or if they presented obstacles which the children felt were insurmountable. Rule modifications are constantly being made by older children in the playground as well. There, several girls who were playing a game of four square decided to catch the ball before they bounced it into their friend’s square. Thus, they changed the usual format of the game to
accommodate their skills and needs. These scenarios indicate that it is possible to include games as a characteristic of play so long as the children who are participating in the game feel it is within their power to change the rules to suit their needs. This conclusion corroborates the findings of Opie and Opie who observed children’s play in a playground setting and stated that “children involved in playground games shape the rules to suit their needs; throughout the play activity the situation remains under the children’s control” (as cited in King, p. 154). Moreover, Fergus Hughes maintains that “the competitive element notwithstanding, much of the activity that occurs during a game of rules really is play” (1991, p. 111).

Finally, play involves the active engagement of its participants. For however long the play lasts, the children will be engaged intellectually, physically, emotionally, and, depending on the activity, socially as well. For these reasons one child involved in the study said that “play means to do something in an active way.” Michael Henniger’s views about play also support the belief that, in play, participants are actively involved. As he says, “Play is a hands-on activity where children are learning by doing. Children in the play experience are not passive observers, but rather actively engaged in moving, manipulating and exploring things in their world” (1987, p. 170).

In conclusion, then, one might define play as an active, spontaneous, process-oriented, pleasurable activity which often has elements of make-believe and which can also include games, so long as the children do not feel constrained by the formal rules. One other consideration which must also be included in clarifying what is meant by play is that it does not involve work. As one of the subjects of the study said, “Play means to me you do no work you just play.” Perlmutter and Burrell have said that “the debate [between work and play] deals with the balance between child-chosen activity and teacher-assigned activity” (1995, p. 15). To help decide whether an activity is work or play it is helpful to look at what children themselves believe constitutes each. In a
survey outlined in Perlmutter and Burrell:

The children tended to categorize the activities that they chose in the classroom environment as “play.” . . . The children most often identified creative play, blocks and sand as “for play” although the blocks that stick together are to be counted and measured and thus are for work . . . How a material is categorized appears to depend on what the child is doing with the material. This may be why several children said that blocks and sand are for working and playing. If the child measures the sand, that child is working, but if the child has a war in the sand table, he is probably playing. (p. 17)

To summarize, it must be said that the line between play and work is sometimes blurred. Or as a publication of the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations (FWTAO) of Ontario has stated, “The distinction between work and play will simply vanish in the wealth of activity” (1986, p. 19). Although such may be the case it is critical for an understanding of this paper to recognize that play is a voluntary activity which is controlled by the child and which is entered into for its intrinsic motivation and not because it holds out the promise of reward other than the pleasure which is inherent in actually doing the activity.

The Need for Play

Even though the political climate in Ontario seems determined to institute a return to traditional instruction, there has already been a wealth of literature which supports the inclusion of classroom play as part of the curriculum. Why then is it necessary to supply a further rationale for providing opportunities for play in schools? One possible response is that very little research has been conducted with reference to play and children in the upper elementary school. In fact, the vast majority of the
research into play and its impact on children has been "limited to preschool and kindergarten because of the difficulty of observing children of middle childhood in bouts of free play" (Pepler, 1987, p. 84). For this reason, Pepler argues, "The research on the effects of play should be extended to include older children" (Pepler, 1995, p. 548). The inclusion of play within the curriculum of older children is made even more urgent by the fact that 10- and 11-year-olds face a crucial time in their development, one in which they undergo vast changes in their physical and psychological natures. The need to gain acceptance by their peer groups is accompanied by the need to demonstrate to themselves and to others that they have talents, skills and, abilities that they can be proud of. This need for industry is reflected in their play. Furthermore, children at this stage of development face increasing academic pressures which will no doubt influence their attitude towards school. For those who succeed academically, positive feelings for school will continue; for those who do not, school will become an ever-increasing burden. Even those who do well academically, however, may harbour negative thoughts about their schooling since "older elementary students have fewer and fewer opportunities to find 'fun' in their school work and, if Dewey is correct, more and more opportunities to find drudgery" (Block, 1987, p. 256). Consequently, older schoolchildren will look to have fun "outside of instruction or even despite it" (Block, p. 256). Thus, children will begin to engage in what King has termed "illicit play" in which children misbehave as a means of introducing some fun into their daily routine (1987, p. 146).

Prior to examining what other educators have said about play in the review of the literature, it is interesting to note that there is an ineluctable irony concerning the role of play in the schooling of our children. When preschoolers commence their education, they are allowed the freedom to roam, to explore, to talk, to create, all through the medium of play. Yet, these children are not allowed the same liberties as
they get older despite the fact that they are far more capable and efficient than when they were enrolled in the early childhood programme. Schoolchildren in the upper elementary grades, in effect, are not granted the element of trust that their younger counterparts are afforded. Moreover, as we turn to what others have cited about the impact of play on schoolchildren, it is noteworthy to keep in mind what some authorities such as Athey and Weininger have said about the relationship of play and older children; namely, that "play comes into its own as a powerful medium for learning during the preschool and elementary school years" (Athey, 1974, p. 50).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being; and he is only fully a human being when he plays.

Friedrich Schiller (n.d.)

This chapter examines the history of play, the theories which have been expounded to account for it, and the arguments that researchers have presented for its utilization in schools. The vast majority of the literature related to play has been directed to early childhood education. It may be problematic, then, to attribute the same characteristics of play to elementary school children as to their younger counterparts. Yet, as Daiute has stated, the “role of play in school-based learning is similar to that of preschool play” (1989, p. 2). Therefore, not only will the attributes of play be presented but special attention will also be devoted to a discussion of how play is related to the interests of children between the ages of nine and eleven since this study relates play to that age group specifically. In addition, I propose to examine three distinct approaches to education in an effort to see whether the inclusion of play can be justified in the school life of a child of this age group.

The History of Play

In order to investigate the role of play in today’s schools, it is important to understand how play itself was implemented in the past. For only by understanding the past can we have any hope of coming to terms with the present and giving promise to the future. The value of play as an educational concern can be traced back to the
Romantic philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau was not an advocate of the traditional method of instruction which called for memorization and recitation by the children of only a privileged few. To a certain extent he set the stage for the child-centred experiments which took place two hundred years later as he embraced the uniqueness of each individual. "He believed that a child needed to be active in a natural environment where a tutor would follow the child and respond to the child's questions and answers" (Glickman, 1984, p. 260).

As with the state of education today, in which practice often lags behind philosophy, the schools of the nineteenth century did not reflect Rousseau's iconoclastic thinking. During the preindustrial era when society primarily maintained an agrarian existence, "the purpose of school was [still] to exercise the mind through recitation and memorization" (Glickman, 1984, p. 260). Children used play for pretending to be a farmer and hunter if they acted the role of the father, or a cook and child-care sitter if they imitated the mother. There were, however, some efforts to adopt Rousseau's views. As early as 1795, Friedrich Schiller elevated the role of play when he compared it to a form of art in which neither was engaged in to satisfy any particular needs. Rather, it was thought that a child would choose an activity freely without any practical or functional considerations (Smilansky, 1990, p. 92). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Johann Pestalozzi prepared us for the hands-on active learning of today's schools by allowing children to have "concrete, tactile experiences prior to abstract, symbolic processes. He believed in a loving, firm teacher who would work with children following guidelines of extending knowledge from sense to abstraction" (Glickman, 1984, p. 261). Such a stance was virtually heresy in an age when teaching was conducted by strict, severe taskmasters. By supporting the use of concrete objects prior to conceptualization, Pestalozzi preceded Piaget in developing a curriculum which has been in vogue for at least the past twenty-five years.
Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) also supported the use of play in his kindergarten where he used balls, wooden blocks, and a variety of arts and crafts materials in a programme which was highly prescriptive (Saracho, 1991, p.45) insofar as it compelled children to follow definite instructions when they played with the materials. For Froebel, play was thought to be the basis for all childhood education (Manning and Boels, 1987, p. 206). He, too, emphasized the role of the individual when he encouraged children to find meaning in their play with objects. However, as with Pestalozzi, he saw play as a means to attain a certain goal which was the teacher’s and not the student’s. Similarly, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) also employed playlike materials in her kindergarten curriculum but the fact that children had to use these materials in a very definitive manner did not allow for the presence of play as it has been defined. There were, however, certain elements in Montessori’s instruction which were very playlike. For instance, she maintained that “the child had to develop at his, or her, own pace through freely chosen activities” (Cohen, 1987, p. 27). Where Montessori seemed to depart from the notion of play as it has been defined for the purposes of this study was in her application of materials. For Montessori, play with materials was not useful for its intrinsic worth, but rather because it helped to complete particular tasks.

The age of industrialization saw tremendous societal changes including a great influx of immigrants to North America and a rapid increase in urbanization. These transitions reflected a new attitude about play which was no longer considered an imitation of adult life (Glickman, 1984, p. 263). Immigrant parents wanted their children to have a better life than they had; consequently, play was no longer needed as a preparation for their future roles. Schools were interested in productivity and since “play was not viewed as productive it was regarded as frivolous and thus not included in schools” (Glickman, p. 263). Manning and Boals suggest that play was not afforded
a great deal of respect for two reasons: 1) society lacked an understanding of children and 2) the prevailing work ethic during the age of industrialization mitigated against the consideration of play as an important contributor in a child's upbringing (1987, p. 206). Moreover, Nancy King postulates that “children's play was considered a sign of moral laxity” (as cited in Manning & Boals, 1987, p. 206) which did not provide easily observable benefits. An account of the history of play in the twentieth century will be presented later in this chapter under a discussion of educational orientations.

The Theories of Play

Classical Theories

To account for the reasons why young children played, a number of classical theories have been espoused. The first, the surplus energy theory introduced by Herbert Spencer in 1860, maintains that people accumulate energy which must be released either in a goal-oriented activity which would constitute work, or in a goalless activity which would constitute play. “Play is caused by a) the existence of energy surplus to the needs of survival and b) an increased tendency to respond after a period of response deprivation” (Ellis, 1973, p. 46). This theory, according to Spodek and Saracho, appeals to a commonsense approach which simply says that “when children are constrained, energy seems to build up until they are ready to explode and all manner of activity seems to burst forth” (1988, p.13). However, it fails to account for the fact that children play even when they are fatigued.

The relaxation theory proposes that play is used to replenish expended energy because it allows people to gather additional energy through recreation. That excess energy can then be used for work. According to this position, then, children would have little motivation to play since they would not need the energy required for work. The fact, however, that children still want to play despite not being required to work
leads many people to have serious reservations about the plausibility of the relaxation theory.

The recapitulation theory postulates that children, through play, will emulate the activities of earlier peoples in the cultural history of the race. Thus, according to this theory, children will more likely resemble the ancestors of their civilization rather than modern adults. Ellis argues against recapitulation as a theory to explain play since he contends that “there is no linear progression in our play development that seems to mirror the development of a species” (1973, p. 47).

Finally, the last classical theory to explain why children play, the preexercise theory, maintains that children practise in play what they will become as adults when they are called upon to work. In this sense play is used to prepare children for working as adults. A young girl acting as mother in the dollhouse center or a boy who plays doctor in a hospital scenario are illustrations of this theory. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Karl Groos studied both animals and human beings and concluded that “creatures used play to pre-exercise their skills [and to] sharpen many of their instinctive behaviors” (Cohen 1987, p. 29).

**Modern Theories of Play**

Although each of the theories above has merit in certain cases, none can fully account for why children play in all circumstances. In contrast to these classical theories, two psychodynamic theories of play have been developed to gain an understanding of children’s play. The psychoanalytic theory, which is largely based on the influence of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), presents us with a valid rationale for using play with children. Psychoanalytic theory maintains that there are three mental processes: the id, the ego, and the superego which vie for influence within a person’s unconscious. The id, representing a person’s drives, competes with the constraints of
the superego or conscience, often resulting in unpleasant internal conflict. The ego, with its concern for reality, tries to maintain a balance between these two polar forces. “The problem besetting an individual during development is to develop an ego that can chart that path and resist the blandishments of the extremes” (Ellis, 1973, pp. 58, 59). What makes the psychoanalytic theory so appealing to proponents of play is its insistence that an ego can be strengthened through the use of play. In Ellis’ words:

Play is partially separated from reality and allows the child’s ego freedom to bend with the demands of [the] id and superego. The child can try out new balance points and mechanisms. The ego can be exercised and in so doing work out conflicts between id and superego. Play involves the acquisition of control by the ego and the amelioration of the effects of loss of control. In other words, play is a critical process for the development of ego strength in the normal child. (1973, p. 59)

Moreover, “play is a cathartic activity where children communicate their feelings to overcome distressing incidents” (Saracho, 1991, p. 49); it thereby helps to avoid fixation and preclude adult neuroses. Ellis declares that it is this capacity to repeat in play prior unpleasant experiences which is “the most important element in the psychoanalytic conception of the child and play” (1973, p. 60). Additionally, according to psychoanalytic theory, a child undergoes sublimation in that “the play situation offers him an opportunity to express and control creative impulses” (Smilansky, 1990, p. 98). For the reasons presented, educators, who are of the opinion that play is a four-letter word and that schools should have little or nothing to do with it, might want to reevaluate their thinking and at least consider play for its vital contribution to mental development.

Whereas the psychoanalytic theory tries to account for children’s play in terms of the dynamic unconscious, Piaget’s theory of cognitive operations examines play
according to rational intelligent thought. Piaget believed that play was necessary for the development of intelligence. According to his theory, learning took place as a result of two reciprocal processes, namely, assimilation and accommodation. With the former, children would absorb information according to the psychological schemata which they had previously formed from prior exposure to similar situations.

Accommodation takes place when children have to change their schemata to suit a new circumstance. For example, children may have some prior notions as to how to catch a ball because they have had the opportunity to have a large, soft ball tossed their way on several occasions. When confronted with a tennis ball being pitched to them for the first time, they will use their prior experiences as stored in their schemata to catch the ball. But because of the size, weight, speed, and trajectory of this new projectile, they will have to modify what they already know about catching a ball to accommodate to the new situation. Piaget maintains that intelligence is a result of a harmonious equilibrium which occurs between what people already know, namely assimilation, and the changes they must make to fit the new situation, namely accommodation. When assimilation predominates over accommodation, play occurs. As Flavell explained:

In play the primary object is to mold reality to the whim of the cognizer, in other words to assimilate reality to various schemas with little concern for precise accommodation to that reality. Thus, as Piaget put it, in play there is primacy of assimilation over accommodation. (as cited in Ellis, 1973, p. 67)

On the other hand, when accommodation prevails, imitation takes place. Now children are so concerned with “taking exact account of the reality of the imitated” (Ellis, p. 67) that they will modify their schemata in order to copy the new stimulus. As a result of “the increased cognitive complexity of the child resulting from development, the complexity of play would [also] increase with time” (Ellis, p. 68).
Piaget describes the following progression with respect to play. During the first eighteen months of life, a period Piaget termed the sensorimotor stage because so much of an infant’s life was centred around bodily actions, “practice play” emerges. In practice play a baby will repeat an action that “initially (and often by accident) leads to satisfactory conclusions” (Cratty, 1986, p. 4). These circular reactions, as Piaget called them, lead the child to engage in practice play because they facilitate the acquisition of pleasure from knowing that “the action is under his/her control” (Rubin & Pepler, 1982, p. 290).

From the ages of two to seven, a period Piaget termed the preoperational stage, children become engaged in what is known as symbolic play. Now the child is capable of representation, a stage in which the toddler or young child can use toys to represent something which is real (such as holding a plastic telephone to the ear and pretending to call Grandma). Piaget felt this pretend play was significant because it enabled children to develop cognitively. Through pretend play, children were able to develop such intellectual capacities as decentration and reversibility. With the former, a child would demonstrate multiple uses for a given object (for example, a rolling pin could be used as a rolling pin or a rocket ship) while with the latter, a child could move “between the dual roles of Luke Skywalker and the self” (Rubin & Pepler, 1982, p. 292). Thus, for Piaget, “the ability to produce and to share symbolic meanings in play appears to reflect certain aspects of cognitive growth” (Rubin & Pepler, p. 292).

With the onset of the stage of concrete operations from the ages of seven to eleven, the predominant form of children’s play becomes the game with rules in which children begin to compete with one another according to a preexisting set of regulations. According to Piaget, games with rules contribute to a child’s social and cognitive competencies because they necessitate a decline in egocentric thought and because they are adaptive (Rubin & Pepler, p. 293).
For Piaget, then, play was an important activity because it contributed to the development of a child’s cognitive abilities. Eminent researchers such as Bruner and Sutton-Smith have also linked play to enhancing children’s problem-solving abilities. For Piaget and his followers, play was important but only because it contributed to a child’s intellect and not because of its intrinsic value. The cause of education has been enhanced incalculably by Piaget because of his emphasis on the use of manipulatives during the stage of concrete operations as a prerequisite to abstract thinking. However, his concern with cognitive development has not elevated the notion of play to the level where it can be incorporated into the schools for its own sake.

Ellis has also introduced several modern theories which characterize play as either a function of competence motivation or arousal seeking. The former “suggests that people receive satisfaction from developing competency because it enables children to act on their environment, becoming more effective in their actions and thus [receive] personal satisfaction” (Spodek and Saracho, 1988, p. 15). In this respect, Eckler cites White’s findings (1959) that “children want to be competent as they interact with their environment, and that feelings of efficacy and satisfaction that are associated with competence, motivate them in this pursuit” (1988, p. 175).

Arousal-seeking theory, which Ellis tells us was initially suggested by Groos, proposes that people need to be involved in information-processing activities. Without adequate stimulation a person will be in a state of discomfort and will compensate by looking for stimulation either externally or internally. Too much of this stimulation will prevent a person from coping successfully with it. Play, according to this theory, mediates the amount of stimulation so that an optimal arousal level is attained (Spodek and Saracho, 1988, p.15). At the same time, the expenditure of energy accelerates the heart rate, increases in-depth respiration, and arouses a feeling of general well-being (Ellis, 1973, p. 30).
With respect to the age group under study in this research, it is also helpful to draw upon the theories of Erik Erikson who modified Piaget’s stage of concrete operations for children aged seven to eleven by postulating a theory of development he called the stage of industry. At this point of their lives, so Erikson believed, children begin to emulate grown-ups by entering into games where they satisfy their ego needs by gaining a sense of accomplishment. This feeling of mastery is just one of the many ways in which play contributes to a child’s well-being (as cited in Mann, 1996, p. 460). Erikson elevated the role of play in the development of a child because he believed, as did Winnicott, that play did more than just “reveal personality conflicts or attempt to heal them. They saw that play was linked to creativity and ‘the search for self’” (Cohen, 1987, p. 152). It is this search for self which will now be addressed as I discuss the predominant educational orientations of the twentieth century.

Educational Orientations of the Twentieth Century

**Essentialism**

The traditional approach to education was a remnant of the nineteenth century school system which stood for rigidity, correctness, and conformity. Traditional education had its roots in the philosophies of idealism and realism. The former maintained that individuals could never attain ultimate truths on their own while the latter emphasized the quest for knowledge and the fact that it “was not gained by faith but rather by reason” (Glickman, 1984, p. 258). Together these two doctrines combined to form a philosophy of essentialism because they both embraced the notion that the aim of education was “to learn the essential and timeless facts of existence” (Glickman, p. 250). In its pursuit of knowledge and its basic distrust of the power of the individual to gather it on his own, the universe became “reducible to
separated isolated components" (Miller, 1996, p. 16). The fact that knowledge was seen “as fixed rather than as process and [was] usually broken down into smaller units” (Miller, p. 6) has prompted Miller to describe this approach to education as “atomistic.” The industrial era’s emphasis on productivity also influenced the schools. Under the influence of Franklin Bobbitt, schools adopted a mechanistic, engineering style in which “teachers were trained according to scientific principles of instruction that standardized objectives, lesson plans and methods of evaluation. . . . Curriculum now included those subjects that made man productive” (Glickman, p. 263).

The psychological ground upon which this traditional approach to education was based was the behavioral learning theory of B. F. Skinner. According to Skinner, the purpose of teaching was to “bring about desired responses by a pupil” (Mason, 1972, p. 185). Since the answers had already been predetermined by programmers, it was left to the teacher to lead the student through a succession of steps, each of which was reinforced until the ultimate correct result was attained. Since the physical and biological sciences in addition to mathematics and the languages were conducive to this type of instruction, these four disciplines were primarily the subjects which were taught.

Therefore, teaching could be described as linear or sequential. The curriculum was reduced to small units so that the child could proceed in a step by step manner. The latitude of responses was restricted since answers had already been deemed right or wrong by curriculum designers. Mastery of content became the uppermost objective in the minds of teachers and students. In order to attain this goal, Miller tells us that traditional or competency-based education (which he labelled transmission) involved: 1) the selection of competency statements; 2) the specification of evaluation indicators to assess competency achievements; and 3) the development of an appropriate instructional system (1996, p. 16). The student’s responsibility was to
receive information and accumulate skills, both of which could be achieved by reading a textbook or listening to a teacher's explanation. The teacher's task was to impart his superior knowledge and transmit it to his students through lecture, recitation, repetition, and drill. Since play was viewed as frivolous and, therefore, not productive, it was not included in the school curriculum (Glickman, 1984, p. 263).

Transmission is an approach to education which is rigid and impersonal. There is no room for spontaneity or individuality; plans and goals are specific and results are either right or wrong. To a certain extent we are presently witnessing a return to traditional teaching and essentialist philosophy. The recent outcomes-based curriculum and the increased emphasis on standardized testing as a means of evaluating student achievement signify this return to essentialism. The trend in schools today seems similar to the traditional education of previous eras which ignored "the inner life of the person and [was] only concerned with environment and behavior" (Miller, 1996, p. 35). Play has no place whatsoever in this climate.

Progressivism

In contrast to the essentialist tradition of teaching, progressivism, which became popular in some educational areas between 1910 and 1950, did not revere knowledge as an end in itself. Rather, knowledge was to be used as a means of developing intelligence by adopting a scientific, naturalistic approach in which students would embark on an active inquiry into problems. In the words of John Dewey, the educational philosopher who is most closely identified with progressivism, "not knowledge or information but self-realization is the goal" (1902, p. 9). Dewey's approach was very much opposed to the static transmission model of traditional instruction in which the teacher drilled information into the student through lecture and recitation. Dewey believed that education took place through student inquiry into a
problem by means of the scientific method. Essentially, the scientific method involved the identification of a problem, possible solutions to the solving of that problem, the formulation of a hypothesis to solve it, and the testing of that hypothesis. The teacher's role was to “facilitate problem-solving among students. The teacher was prepared to understand the student as well as the skills of inquiry and then place them together in scientific, experimental ventures” (Glickman, 1984, p. 258). In Dewey's own words, the teacher was concerned “not with subject matter as such, but with the subject matter as a related factor in a total and growing experience. Thus to see it is to psychologize it” (1902, p. 22). The teacher, then, was to take subject material and to develop it within the range and scope of the child's life (Dewey, p. 30). This model for education is now adopted by any teacher who wants to make subject material relevant to the child. For instance, during reading instruction a teacher will try to pique the student's interest by asking questions which will draw on the child's personal experience, thereby sparking curiosity and leading to enhancing comprehension.

Dewey's philosophy was a reflection of his democratic liberalism and a rejection of the nineteenth-century idealism which characterized traditional education. For Dewey, the function of the school was socialization (Mason, 1972, p. 67). He elevated the role of the individual and the child because he "could see no ground for one social morality outside school and another inside. . . . Because children and adolescents [were] people [too]” (Mason, p. 84). Dewey became associated with a child-centred curriculum because he felt that "children. not subject matters are of prime importance" (Mason, p. 86). He believed that children would learn when they were interested and when "the need [was] felt" (Mason, p. 130). He understood that learning was an active process in which "subject matter can never be got into the child from without" (Dewey, 1902, p. 9).

The role of play, which was virtually non-existent in traditional schools, now
became expanded. At Caroline Pratt's play school, established in Greenwich Village in 1914, "play was viewed as the means for artistic expression and the pursuit of a student's own ability, interest and talent" (Glickman, 1984, p. 265). Play was further legitimized by Freudian psychology which used it to develop mental health. However, as I pointed out in Chapter One, there is often a great difference between what may be preached and what is practised. Despite the characterization of the progressive era as the "play era in curriculum reform. . . . Most teachers and schools persisted with lecture, textbooks, and written assignments" (Glickman, p. 265). Some teachers may have rejected the notion of play for the reasons I cited previously such as the fear of losing control and the absence of clearly observable, measurable results. Mason suggests that many educators were wary of:

- support for a relativistic almost anti-intellectual kind of educational individualism. To them, to be scientific meant to enter into free, open questioning of all established routines. They found in science justification for a kind of romantic laissez-faire in school practice. Thus arose the claim of critics of the schools that in the name of a vulgarized, pseudo-scientific point of view, a certain softness and intellectual and moral flabbiness sometimes developed. (Mason, 1972, p. 83).

One should also be cognizant of the use of play in Dewey's pragmatist model. Dewey, who used the term "Instrumentalism" to describe his philosophy (Mason, 1972, p. 61) felt that the purpose of education was to shape the person who would take his place as a worthy citizen in a community of free men (Mason, p. 67). With this in mind, the school's role was to develop intelligence so that an educated person would graduate with the "skills and knowledges [sic] to meet and master the new problems that come our way" (Mason, p. 82). In short, Dewey's use of play was in a problem-solving context consistent with cognitive psychology which focuses on thinking and
intelligence - Dewey’s uppermost concern (Miller, 1996, p. 35). Since the role of play was limited to this function, Dewey’s pragmatist model, or what Miller calls transaction, has little room for the “self.” The pragmatist outlook of the self was elucidated by William James who, Mason tells us:

viewed the self as a stream of consciousness. A mysterious transcendental ego or Aristotelian soul was considered not necessary to explain human behavior. . . . It is the thoughts that do the thinking. There is no substance or entity which may rightly be called mind or soul. (Mason, p. 77)

To account for the soul in education and, at the same time, to examine the role of play, it is now necessary to explore the third of the predominant educational trends of this century, namely existentialism.

Existentialism

Existentialism was a revolt against the use of knowledge, science, and reason. Instead, it highlighted the role of the individual who would explore his inner feelings, thoughts, and experience (Glickman, 1984, p. 259) in order to come to terms with his “being.” In this respect, existentialism is very closely aligned with the holistic curriculum as outlined by John Miller which, in turn, is based on the practices of Rudolf Steiner. For both Miller and Steiner, “holistic curriculum implies spirituality or sense of the sacred” (Miller, 1996, p. 3). Transformational learning, the term used by Miller to imply holistic education, involves the whole person and not just the rational, cognitive domain as with pragmatism. It seeks wisdom through connecting the self with the Self, a concept which seeks awareness of one’s being. In this endeavour, holistic education attempts to establish connections or relationships between linear thinking and intuition, between mind and body, among subjects, between the individual and the community, between the person and the earth and between self and Self.
(i) Intuitive Connections

By connecting linear thinking with intuition, holistic education attempts to restore a balance between sequential learning and direct knowing. Through the use of techniques like visualization and metaphor (i.e., connecting two ideas that are not normally related to one another yet share some commonality) holistic education strives to “bring soul, life and vitality back into the classroom” (Miller, 1996, p. 104).

(ii) Body-Mind Connection

The connection between body and mind is a response to a school system where “feelings are taken for granted” (Miller, 1996, p. 109). In this respect Miller draws upon the vision of James Lynch who seeks an education which gives children the opportunity to allow their feelings to emerge instead of hiding them or controlling them, thus denying children the chance to understand them. Through the practice of mindfulness (the slowing down of the mind and the focusing on one task at a time), movement and drama, children connect their minds with their bodies and thereby engender human wholeness (Miller, p. 120).

(iii) Subject Connections

Holistic education is a reaction to the atomistic, fragmented approach of transmission education in which school is compartmentalized into subjects which make linear thinking accessible but which have little to do with the life of the soul. One might, for instance, regard a spelling textbook as an instrument of transmission. The lessons within are sequential and lend themselves to recitation and memorization but do not have much to do with the life of the child. An integrated curriculum, on the other hand, in which art is connected to reading, writing, and other disciplines all under the umbrella of a particular theme, has more meaning for a child. In this circumstance,
instead of simply reciting a number of facts and figures, the child can gain understanding by seeing the connections between subjects. If, for instance, the class were studying Canada, spelling exercises would concentrate on words and ideas related to Canada. (An essentialist approach, on the other hand, would use a spelling textbook which often has little to do with the class’ current focus of study.) For this reason, holistic education adopts a whole language approach since it uses a child’s own experiences to bring life to a story.

(iv) Community Connections

Holistic curriculum holds that relationships should be formed between the student and the community beginning in the classroom. Holistic schools, then, favour cooperative learning since it is felt that the establishment of teams of children working together will foster a sense of community which can then be extended to the school and outside as well. Holistic thinking in this context is closely linked with William Glasser’s control theory which says that “we can’t really force kids to do things in the classroom; instead we only attempt to provide an environment that meets their needs” (Miller, 1996, p. 138). In doing so, it is felt that children will begin to feel that what they have to offer is important.

(v) Earth Connections

The extension of the self with the community is the connection between the self and the earth. Holistic education recognizes the need, then, for environmental education. It sees the folly of global competitiveness because the latter reduces decision-making, including the choice of careers, to economic factors, an ultimately alienating state of affairs.
(vi) Self Connections

Lastly, holistic curriculum attempts to connect the self with the Self. In other words it aims to bring about a wisdom or an awareness in which children have an opportunity to come to terms with their entire being including all intellectual, emotional, and social aspects. During what Steiner has labelled the etheric stage from the ages of seven to eleven, the Waldorf school employs fairy tales as a vehicle for learning since it builds “the foundation for compassionate imagination which is so linked with the Self” (Miller, 1996, p. 166). Holistic schools adopt methods such as meditation and contemplation since it is felt that they enhance awareness by generating “a more receptive mode of consciousness” (Miller, p. 168).

Holistic education is largely based on a “perennial” philosophy which claims that all things are part of an indivisible unity or whole. In this respect holistic education sets itself apart from both transmission and pragmatism. For the former, school was reduced to a recitation of facts which had little to do with the learner. With the latter, school involved the student but only insofar as the inquiry into a problem was concerned. In this sense, progressivism can be seen as rational and scientific. Perennial philosophy, on the other hand, is concerned with the whole person including intellectual, emotional, and social domains. With respect to social concerns, holistic curriculum is closely connected to caring since “we care when we receive the concerns of others” (Noddings, as cited in Miller, 1996, p. 26).

This notion of caring is tied to the teachings of Carl Rogers who maintained that “the most essential attitude in the facilitation of learning is realness or genuineness” (as cited in Miller, 1996, p. 171). Congruence, a term used by Rogers to mean realness or authenticity, implied that teachers need to be in touch with their inner life and that they should live according to their espoused values. Thus, teachers should
“be prepared to ask the same questions of themselves that they ask of students” (Miller, p. 178). If such is the case, teachers will demonstrate authenticity in their dealings with students and exhibit the care which accompanies connectedness to others (p. 179).

Holistic education’s psychological context lies within transpersonal psychology which draws from two sources. The first, the mystical traditions within the major faiths, contribute to holism through such doctrines as the teachings of Jesus who said, “Your faith has made you whole” and Hinduism’s contention that a person can attain union with God by practising meditation and devoting oneself to selfless service. In addition, holistic education borrows from the psychology of Jung who thought that the Self or soul contributed to spiritual development by sending messages to the ego. According to Jung, a person can receive these messages during the solution of a problem or in the midst of an artistic activity (Miller, p. 25).

It is, in part, for this reason that I believe that holistic education lends itself to the inclusion of play more than either transmission or progressivism does. Transmission allows for play only insofar as it would “result in student acquisition of predetermined knowledge” (Glickman, 1984, p. 259). For instance, a game of Math Bingo might be played in order to reinforce students’ knowledge of multiplication facts. However, since this activity is in the hands of the teacher and is instrumental because it is concerned with a product, it hardly deserves recognition as play as I have defined it.

Progressivism is more conducive to the inclusion of play but, because it is primarily interested in problem solving, it lacks the range to embrace all aspects of play. One might also argue that play in a pragmatic model would also be under the control of the teacher who would presumably put forth the problem to be solved. Existentialism, however, is concerned with the whole child and, thus, a holistic context can be used to explore the emotional and social impact of play as well. In the following
section I will explore the attributes of play particularly with respect to the social and emotional domains.

The Contributions of Play

1. Mastery

One of the great frustrations of childhood is that children feel helpless and dependent on others. By resorting to play, children provide themselves with the opportunity to pretend to be powerful, independent and in control. As Mann has put it, “Children are weak and want to be strong, they are small and want to be big . . . By playing they can swim oceans, climb buildings and do all the things they would like to do but cannot” (1996, p. 452). Moreover, by using play as their medium, children are able to explore reality without fear of anxiety and can, for a short time at least, be masters of whatever it is they choose. It is important to realize that while children are playing they are, in effect, attempting to understand and come to terms with reality and the expectations of adulthood within a safe environment. Through play, practice, and eventual mastery, children attain the sense of industry and feelings of accomplishment to which they aspire and, thus, acquire self-esteem. Again, in Mann’s words, “Controlling the world, at least part of the world, is directly related to how much self-esteem the child has and that is in turn related to educational achievement” (1996, p. 453). Feelings of competence are particularly vital to the self-concept of school-age children who need to “demonstrate to themselves and others that they are competent, that they have talents, skills and abilities that they can be proud of. In their play there is reflected this need for industry” (Hughes F., 1991, p. 108). By gaining proficiency through play, school-age children not only gain in self-esteem but also “are likely to promote acceptance by the peer group” (Hughes F., p.108) which is just now beginning to supplant the family as the main focus of support.
By exhibiting to themselves their new mastery, children gain a sense of control because they no longer feel bound by the need for reward or external praise. The normal state of affairs in school usually ensures that the teacher is always in the position of control, either by structuring the child’s activities or by evaluating the child’s work. However, as Ginott has maintained, this dependence breeds hostility and so it is incumbent on teachers to provide a means in which this hostility is reduced (1972, p. 90). Play is one way of lessening this antipathy since it enables children “to control and manipulate . . . with total flexibility and mastery” (Weininger, 1979, p. 30). Furthermore, if the play is intrinsically motivating, “then praise and rewards are not necessary” (Mann, 1996, p. 454). Rogers and Sawyer support this contention when they say:

Children who are exposed to indiscriminate praise and rewards learn to rely on recognition of their activity by the important people in their lives. They are then motivated only by the dangling carrot - receiving a reward - rather than by the self-sustaining interest in the activity itself. (as cited in Mann, 1996, p.455)

In Living and Learning (1968) Hall and Dennis declare that “one of the main educational tasks. . . should be to build upon an intrinsic interest in learning and lead children to learn for themselves rather than from fear of disapproval or desire for praise” (p. 57). Since play precludes this need for external evaluation one would conclude that play should be an essential ingredient in a child’s schooling.

2. Social Contributions

Children who are entering the concrete stage of operations are gradually becoming less egocentric than they were during the preoperational stage. Play helps ease this transition “by incorporating others into their lives and adjusting their own behavior to accommodate those others” (Rubin, as cited in Mann, 1996, p. 465). As
children cooperate to make a sand castle or come together to create a skit they learn to share their ideas and respect others' points of view. In Hughes' words, "the establishment of and adherence to a set of rules requires sensitivity to the viewpoints of other people, mutual understanding, willingness to delay gratification and a high degree of cooperation" (1991, p. 111). This need to delay gratification is especially evident in games where children have to learn to take turns. The child also uses games to "test his developing self . . . using the rules as a way of finding out how he stands in relationship to other children" (Weininger, as cited in Mann, 1996, p. 456). As children enter the ages of middle childhood from seven to eleven, their peer group becomes the major socializing agent and it is from their peer group that children discover the culture of childhood (Hughes F., p.100) and gain a sense of fulfillment from belonging to a group (Day, 1980, p. 64).

Unfortunately, some children whom Hughes depicts as rejected or isolated do not gain this sense of belonging because they have adjustment problems for one reason or another. Play activities provide these children with opportunities to learn from other children or adults how to share, cooperate, and take turns (Chazan et al. 1987, p. 70) and, if successful in learning more appropriate ways of responding, they may be able to be among the popular group to whom Hughes refers (1991, p. 111).

Play also enables children to learn to understand and appreciate the value systems of others who may be different from them. Values entail the beliefs, ethics, and actions of an individual. As children of different faiths, racial backgrounds, and cultures play together, they learn to appreciate the differences between them at the same time as they recognize their commonalities. The mutual respect that ensues may lead them to engage in activities which will foster "multifaceted relationships that may gain the attributes of sustained sharing that we call friendship" (Kelly & Godbey, as cited in Monroe, 1995, p. 26).
3. Play provides a sense of enjoyment

Since one of the criteria of play is that it is intrinsically motivating, it provides pleasure and enjoyment to a child's life. Weininger tells us that of all the things play does, first and foremost, "it's fun" (1979, p. 26). Introducing a sense of fun into the school day is in itself a worthy accomplishment since for many children school can be a long, frustrating, tedious, and arduous experience. Hall and Dennis tried to advocate play as an antidote to such an atmosphere when they said that "despite the belief held by many adults that learning must be painful and serious, it is the joy and pleasure of play which often sets the stage for learning" (1968, p. 57). Unfortunately, it seems that their plea for play went unheeded, at least as far as the junior grades were concerned. For as King reports twenty years after the Hall Dennis report was published, "By the fifth grade, work activities no longer include experiences which the children enjoy" (1987, p. 160). Here, King also maintains that the one activity which the children consider pleasurable, play, "is no longer defined to include activities which the children believe to be valued by school officials" (p. 160).

4. Play can alter negative attitudes towards school and adults

The great dilemma which the elementary school faces is how to reconcile the needs of each individual child at the same time that it fulfills its mandate to educate. I have already referred to this quandary in Chapter One where I quoted from Goffin's article which addressed early childhood's concern with child development and schools' preoccupation with achievement. What complicates matters further for schools is the fact that achievement is measured by a child's performance compared with that of her peers or on "the basis of arbitrary, often unrealistic adult standards" (Biber, 1958, p. 10). Therefore, not only are the students alienated by being put in the
position of competition with their friends and the people who sit close by, but also by having to seek approval from their teachers. This resulting sense of dependency provokes feelings of hostility against the teacher.

Moreover, schools' expectations of children to be adult-like in their behavior conflict with their natural predisposition to be excitable, impulsive, and non-conforming. Anna Freud stated more than half a century ago that:

The universal aim of education is always to make out of the child a grown-up person who shall not be very different from the grown-up world around him. Consequently, we have here the starting point for education. It regards as childlike behavior everything in which the child differs from the adult” (1938, p. 45).

Schools, then, are by their very nature designed to promote mature, placid, docile conduct from a sea of individuals whose instincts are spontaneous, selfish, and uninhibited. These conflicting positions result in a state of distrust and suspicion towards the schools and teachers specifically. Hence, Freud has stated that “there arises a kind of 'guerilla war' between educator and child” (1938, p. 57). The task of the schools and educators, then, is to assuage this hostility and dependence. Schools can help to do this by providing an environment which allows for risk-taking and learning by trial and error. They must set up a balance between "instinct-gratification and instinct-restriction" (Freud, p. 104). Or, as Weininger and Daniel have put it, schools must find a balance between “freedom and direction” (1992, p. 171). To do so, they attempt to convince teachers to recognize that children should not be confined to sitting still or working for lengthy periods of time but should rather be provided with opportunities to be spontaneous. Play is one means of furnishing that spontaneity.

In order to create the sense of freedom which spontaneous play engenders, a teacher must create an environment in which the children feel safe to express
themselves without the fear of failure. In the words of Chaillé and Silvern, "Children need to feel the safety and confidence that permits them to take risks, as they do in their play. . . . Conflict must be experienced in order for learning and growth to take place. Children need to feel safe enough to go out on a limb and confident that falling will not matter" (1996, p. 277). Hence, the teacher has to create a classroom culture where the children feel free to express themselves without the fear of failing. The teacher must ensure that his pupils will feel confident to take risks "without the fear of failure, [or] fear of criticism, [or] fear of appearing stupid" (Ginott, 1972, p. 235). Thus, the teacher is once again faced with a conundrum. On the one hand, his job description is such that he must teach a curriculum which is largely based on right and wrong and which, in many cases, does not allow for the expression of incorrect answers. On the other hand, he feels compelled to provide a classroom climate which allows for experimentation, learning through trial and error, and risk-taking. One way he can satisfy both sides of his dilemma is by enabling children to play for at least some part of the day. For it is through play that children feel "the safety and confidence that permits them to take risks" (Chaillé and Silvern, 1996, p.277).

Play can also be used to provide the teacher with an opportunity to set up a competition between the teacher and the student so that the child always wins. Caspari tells us that by beating the teacher in a game situation the relationship between the child and the teacher which, for reasons I have previously mentioned is hostile, is improved (Caspari, 1976, p. 108). The child is able to express her ambivalent feelings in a way that is acceptable to the teacher who accepts his defeat willingly because he realizes that he is enabling his student to express her natural feelings. By allowing for this expression, the teacher-student relationship is strengthened.

Teachers can also enrich their relationship with their classes by exhibiting a
form of playfulness in their own behavior. By adopting a light rather than a heavy-handed approach to dealing with young people, teachers can help bridge the gap between generations and help create an atmosphere of fun and laughter. The rapport which is generated in such a classroom enables the teacher to establish a relationship which will facilitate learning (Smilansky, 1971, p.40). A close, trusting relationship between the teacher and child will help turn around the hostile, suspicious attitude which many children have of adults. According to Koste, “Children do not come into this life with any innate prejudices against anyone; adults inadvertently learn children’s suspicion by revealing a loss of playfulness” (1987, p. 136). To restore their faith in the minds of children, teachers need to “bring a quality of playfulness as well as respect to their relations with children” (Spodek and Saracho, 1988, p. 21). Chazan, Laing, and Harper have also suggested that the suspicious way in which children have depicted adults can be modified by using a play approach (1987, p. 70).

If teachers can facilitate trial and error learning and if they can establish a rapport with their students which alters the suspicious, sometimes hostile attitude that children have of adults, they can create a sense of trust. If they can empower students to take risks without the fear of punishment and if they are humane rather than mechanical in their dealings with children, they will have succeeded the family in providing a “feeling that the world is more safe than threatening, more giving than denying, more accepting than rejecting” (Biber, 1958, p. 2). This sense of trust can be provided by a teacher who understands child development, who sees the value of allowing children a sense of freedom, who brings a quality of playfulness to his approach to children, and who allows room for play within the confines of the classroom. For not only does play allow children spontaneity, the chance to experiment without fear of failure, and the opportunity to control part of their school day, but it can also help to forge an alliance between teacher and child which will help
foster a positive attitude towards school generally. Furthermore, Daiute advises us that “teachers who want to help children work from what they know can set up classroom activities that create room for play” (1989, p. 20) and that if teachers are interested in providing “bridges between what [they] expect [their] students to do and what they do well” (p. 21) they should encourage play since children are expert players.

5. Emotional Impact of Play

According to Ralph Erickson, “it is in emotional development that play is of the greatest importance” (1985, p. 261). Play helps children with their emotional growth in a number of ways. First of all, play has a curative effect in that it enables children to relieve anxiety and tension by permitting the repression of ideas and feelings to enter the conscious. At the same time, it also allows for the expression of anger and hostility that may have welled up in the child and, according to both Weininger and Scarfe, may prevent the child from learning. The former maintains that:

The only medium for expression of his feelings is play, with or without words, until he masters inasmuch as it is possible his feelings about the situation which is upsetting him. Until he has had this chance, he is usually unable to proceed to any other situation comfortably and is unable to learn . . . he is blocked and unable to concentrate on the present. (1979, p. 28)

Similarly, Scarfe also implies that an emotionally disturbed youngster might not be able to learn and that only through play is it possible for the child to make a breakthrough. According to him, play provides an “outlet for feelings and reactions that cannot be expressed so safely in any other way and that, bottled up could contort and abort his development” (1976, p. 9).

Secondly, play allows children to play out their anxieties and repeat negative experiences from a safe distance. By enabling children to relive their upsetting
thoughts from afar without any fear and giving them an opportunity “to communicate their most complicated and painful feelings” (Hughes F., 1991, p. 214) the children’s catharsis is enhanced. Weininger describes “three general motifs which are constants in children’s play: a need for protection, a need for power, and a need to attack and destroy” (as cited in Mann, 1996, p. 456). By allowing these themes to surface through their play, children are able to assuage their anxieties which might otherwise become exacerbated and lead to serious emotional harm.

Thirdly, by dealing with the upsetting experience or feeling through their play, children acquire “a sense of mastery and self-assertion” over their problem. By controlling the event they attain confidence in their ability not to be overwhelmed by the emotion. Practice play, in particular, we are told, “builds confidence and that feeling has a powerful multiplier effect in opening the child to more learning, more growth, more success, more accomplishment, more confidence” (Mann, 1996, p.462). The play has enabled children to gain a feeling of control over their situation thus resulting in greater self-esteem and feelings of competence. Now they feel better equipped to cope with their problems.

Fourthly, play reduces stress because the child does not have to worry about success or failure. For shy children, in particular, we are told, “play activities are safe because they allow children to experiment with new behaviors without fear of failure” (Chazan et al., 1987, p. 70). Play precludes the evaluation which takes place in almost every other aspect of school life and, therefore, there is no need to anticipate frustration as a result of their play. For a little while at least, they can feel free to do what they like since the play “reduces the stress of anticipating success and failure” (Bruner, Jolly, & Genova, 1976, p. 246).

Play also contributes to the mental health of a child through its calming effect. In working with older children with a history of misbehaving in a remedial reading
programme, Mary Noyes used to employ a sandbox prior to the instructional period. She would allow her students to play with the sand as a means of providing each with “an opportunity to project a picture of his inner life” (Noyes, 1981, p. 231). She claimed that “after the play the terrific pressure of his fantasies decreases, leaving his mind clear and more able to focus on reading” (1981, p. 232).

The emotional domain of the child is also addressed through play because of its social aspect. In the first place, the fact that children can be “excellent players” or demonstrate a skill at play provides them with a sense of satisfaction and competence. Particularly with older children, such a feeling of competence is vital, not just because it furnishes them with a sense of pride and accomplishment, but also because it allows them to gain acceptance from their peers who, as previously mentioned, are becoming increasingly important as their primary support group. At the same time, the positive self-image which is gained from their sense of competence “leads to less need to engage in competitive interactions with other children” (Cauley & Tyler, 1989, p. 52).

Play also helps to facilitate children’s emotional health because it allows students to work collaboratively with their classmates. In doing so children gain a sense of creative achievement which Day tells us “provides a motive for self-discipline and self-control. . . . Through dramatic and artistic expressions that are shared with others children are able to externalize [their] feelings” (1987, p. 63).

Play also has a therapeutic effect because it is pleasurable. Rubin and Pepler contend that the ensuing self-worth which results from pursuing a pleasurable activity “may be the most worthwhile (and adaptive) outcome of the play experience” (1982, p. 298).

Play contributes to emotional health because it facilitates self-discovery. “It is by means of play that they are discovering what they feel, what they know and what they want” (Slade, 1994, p. 91). In the same way that adults tell their understandings of
events in a way that "is clarifying and ultimately curative, children create play narratives that - because they express difficult emotions in a coherent and fundamentally communicative fashion - are similarly curative" (Slade, p. 91). Barbara Biber also felt that dramatic play, in particular, contributed to a child’s mental health by means of self-discovery. According to her, “What is important is that the child have opportunity to clarify and reorder what impressed him in terms of his already existing system of ideas and feeling, and so make it more deeply a part of himself” (1958, p. 9). With reference to older children she believed that, by collaborating with their peers, the “playmaking weaves personal meanings and feelings into a definitive social pattern [and therefore] learning is taking place through merging inner feelings with social experience” ( p. 9).

Finally, play contributes to a child’s emotional well-being because it enables children to express unacceptable impulses in acceptable ways. As mentioned previously in my discussion of how play helps children learn to accept adults, and teachers specifically, in a more favourable light, play, when effectively used, can help a child express her hostility in a manner which is tolerable. As a child enters into a competition against her teacher, for instance, she not only begins to gain a better relationship with the person who may be a focus for her hostility but she is also able to express her aggressiveness in a way that the teacher can approve. For this reason, according to psychoanalytic theory, “the child undergoes sublimation through play activities. The play situation offers him an opportunity to express and control creative impulses” (Smilansky, 1990, p. 98). The child begins to understand through these sorts of interactions that it is acceptable to have such strong feelings and that they are manageable. Perhaps unwittingly she also begins to understand that painful emotions and disturbing thoughts can be diminished through play. For these reasons, Day has stated that "play provides an avenue for children to learn that feelings can be safely
expressed and that hostility and aggression can be managed and controlled" (1980, p. 63).

In conclusion, it would seem that researchers of play endorse the use of play in large measure because of its enormous impact on the emotional development of children. Indeed, Scarfe has gone so far as to proclaim that “play is as necessary to the mental health of the child as food is to his physical well-being” (1962, p.118). For this reason Richard Jones has concluded that “all education should be conducted in an atmosphere in which the universal and recurrent emotional disturbances and repressive tendencies of childhood can be resolved as soon as they arise and before they can become chronic” (1960, p.vii).

6. Cognitive Aspects of Play

“Education is concerned not just with learning particular things but [with] learning how to learn or developing intelligence” (FWTAO, 1986, p. 19). Piaget’s theory supports the notion that intelligence is gained through a harmonious equilibrium of accommodation and assimilation. That is, children will always be taking in information from the world and integrating it into their previously formed conceptions, or schemata. When the schemata do not conform to the input of information, the child alters her schemata to fit with the new stimulus in the procedure known as accommodation. According to many critics, play facilitates this process in a number of ways.

Weininger tells us that play “is the cognitive map-maker” in that it “serves to integrate behavior patterns and co-ordinate experiences” (1979, p. 27). In his words a child “builds patterns of what can be expected to happen, and when, and co-ordinates his experiments with things in what is obviously a learning way” (p. 29). These patterns are similar to Piagetian schemata and the coordination to which he refers resembles
the theory of accommodation.

Children not only learn to assimilate and accommodate ideas from the materials they use in their symbolic play but also from the people with whom they play. In pretend play for instance children:

interact with other children and process a range of information, including their peers’ points of view. This interaction can create incongruous responses and the differences that emerge must be resolved; in the process of working out these differences, children develop a more mature level of logical thinking.

(Spodek & Saracho, 1988, p. 16)

Yawkey also echoes the influence of one’s peers in the acquisition of intelligence through pretend play when he says that children “learn concepts from peer group members” (1979, p. 249). By seeing another’s point of view during symbolic play, a child learns to understand the other’s reasoning. At times, however, the exchange of ideas may conflict with preconceived notions that the child may already have. On these occasions when they must learn to work out differences between theirs and others’ thinking, children learn “to adapt to different perspectives” (Spodek & Saracho, 1988, p. 17).

Play also serves as a vehicle which enables the child “to make sense out of the world” (Chaillé and Silvern, 1996, p. 277). Particularly as the child enters into middle childhood where she has passed from the stage of preoperational thought to that of concrete operations, the child's play “becomes increasingly realistic and increasingly characterized by a need for order” (Hughes F., 1991, p. 99). This need to provide structure is made possible through play for several reasons. First, it is meaningful for the child. The child enters into the play because it is freely chosen, intrinsically motivating and because the child feels that she has some degree of control over it. Thus, “the play is educative because while thus employed the child is self-directed,
wholly involved and completely absorbed” (Scarfe, 1962, p. 119). Had the child entered into the play either unwilling or uninterested, then the information which entered his head would be “quickly forgotten or rendered meaningless. If it cannot be assimilated and integrated into what is important or useful to him, it is not likely to be retained” (Weininger, 1979, p. 29). Meaningfulness is ensured by the active engagement of children in their play. “By permitting him and encouraging him to do rather than being done to or being told what to do” (Weininger, p. 27) we are providing children with the impetus to come to an understanding of the world and to attain the capacity for retaining that insight. Chaillé and Silvern also appreciate the significance of the active component to child’s play when they say that “understanding [through play] is created by doing, by doing with others, and by being completely involved in that doing” (1996, p. 277).

Play also contributes to a problem-solving mentality. Bruner, Sylva, and Genova discovered that those who have had prior opportunities to play “are better equipped to solve problems” and “that they encounter frustration better than those who did not” (1976, p. 245) The difference between the problem-solving abilities of the “players” and the “non-players” may be attributable to the fact that Bruner and his colleagues contend that “play enables a child to sustain his activity over a long period of time” (1976, p. 244).

6. The Impact of Play on Language Development

Although it may be difficult to measure the exact ways in which play influences the ability of the child to speak, listen, read, and write, nevertheless, a number of researchers have established a connection between play and language. Perlmutter and Burrell, for instance, maintain that “play and language are intimately linked. Cooperative play provides constant opportunities for oral language to develop. Two
children building a fort or playing store must discuss and organize their efforts with words as well as actions" (1995, p. 17). To the surprise of task-oriented parents and educators fixed on direct instruction, Mann cites Cazden's and Pellegrini's conviction that the more children play, the more likely they are to read early, to write well, and to have advanced language skills" (1996, p. 464). Play influences language development because it "is an essential form of communication (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975, p. 66). In play, children express their ideas and feelings in verbal and non-verbal ways. When they speak, "they practise their vocabulary and concepts" (Weininger, 1979, p. 31). Moreover, their language development is facilitated and enhanced by the fact that they communicate with one another "without the fear of correction or constraint" (Chailié and Silvem, 1996, p. 276). In a study of sociodramatic play, Yawkey concluded that "the forms of language used in play depend on the age of the children, their desire to meaningfully communicate, the content of the episodes, and the setting-individual or group" (1979, p. 252). As children grow older their sociodramatic play becomes more realistic and more logical. There is evidence of greater detail and order as seen by the beginnings, mid-points, and endings of their play sequences. Consequently, "a richer variety and greater quantity of language forms are shown and used by the students" (Yawkey, p. 252).

Besides its influence on the oral language of children, a number of researchers have written about the impact of play on a child's ability to read and write. Moffit and Swedlow, for instance, maintain that a child's learning disabilities, including those involved in reading and writing, arise from poor conceptual and perceptual development (1976, p. 40). During play children are provided with opportunities which facilitate perceptual development. "Following a paintbrush across the paper with the eyes is related to rhythmic scanning which is important for reading" (Moffit & Swedlow, 1976, p. 42) The hand-eye coordination needed for writing, they tell us, can also be
furnished through play activities such as painting, modelling, as well as cutting and pasting.

Weininger, too, attributes many of the requirements for reading to activities learned in play such as visual-motor play, body-image, understanding, and straight-line conceptualizing (1979, p. 31). For him, "to learn to read in a vacuum without play is like trying to walk around without legs" (p. 31). Through play, children learn skills basic to reading such as: (a) the ability to concentrate; (b) the ability to discriminate between shapes; (c) the ability to gain the meaning of words; and (d) the ability to solve problems and make decisions (Day, 1980, p. 62).

7. The Impact of Play on Physical Development

Although the vast majority of research literature is devoted to the influence of play on the cognitive, emotional, and social domains, nevertheless, “play serves a physical function as well” (Mann, 1996, p. 463). Mann tells us that “children are little balls of energy seeking release. They need to burn up calories, they need to stretch and test bodies” (1996, p. 463). In their play, children enjoy opportunities to “make use of their growing muscular skills” and [it] helps them coordinate the developing muscle systems, both gross motor movements and fine motor coordination” (Weininger, 1979, p. 137).

8. Play as an Assessment Tool

The research would seem to indicate that play is used for assessment purposes in two ways. The first involves the teacher’s observation of the child. One of the manuals for teaching in Ontario in the 1970s, Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions, maintains that “play provides a context in which the teacher can observe children’s handling of materials and social situations, [and] assess their stage of
development" (1975, p. 15). Through observation, teachers are able to “gain valuable insights into the children’s concept development, language development, and level of motor development . . . [and observation of play may also] provide indications of their emotional well-being” (Day, 1980, p. 65). Certainly both Melanie Klein and Anna Freud believed from their psychoanalytic point of view that observation of child’s play could be used to gain valuable insights into a child’s emotional state. Klein “believed that children at play will divulge all of their innermost feelings, not directly but symbolically” (Hughes F., 1991, p. 219). To the teacher in a classroom, the insightful observation and requisite interpretation which Kleinian therapists practise may, however, not seem that helpful. A somewhat more practical philosophy might be that of Anna Freud who felt that “the observation of children at play could allow adults to see in one stroke the whole of the child’s psychological world” (Hughes F., 1991, p. 219). The relationship approach to psychotherapy advanced by Virginia Axline also provides a classroom teacher with a rationale for using play as a measure of a child’s emotional well-being. In her view:

the therapist must establish a friendly relationship with the child, accept the child completely, neither praising nor criticizing, communicate an attitude of permissiveness, recognize and reflect the child’s feelings, respect the child’s ability to solve his or her own problems, and be patient enough to allow the child to lead the way in therapy. (Hughes F., 1991, p. 220)

Since it is possible that all of these conditions may be met in a classroom offering play, it would seem that many of the benefits which accrue from the therapy room can also be gained in the classroom. Moreover, the very same limitations which govern the therapy room, namely time, damage to the materials, or harm to people, can easily be transferred to the classroom without any negative effects upon the teacher-child relationship.
Play can also offer valuable insights into other areas of concern for the teacher. In speaking of her colleague’s work in the classroom, Jane Perlmutter notes that play provides “an excellent context for evaluating the development of their concepts and skills. . . . Listening to children pretending allows teachers to assess oral language skills. Thus, play is a context in which the teacher can see what a child can do” (Perlmutter & Burrell, 1995, p. 20).

Secondly, play can be used for the purposes of self-evaluation. For Weininger, it is essential that children also begin to assume a sense of responsibility for their actions (1979, p. 43). Through play, we are told, children are able to “evaluate their own talents” (Erickson R. J., 1985, p. 261) and “gauge their own level of competence” (Mann, 1996, p. 453).

In this chapter I have discussed the history of play and its role in the schools of yesterday and today. I have also described the theories of play including the classical theories which asked “why children play” and the two psychodynamic theories which explained “how children play.” Lastly, I have specified how play is conducive to a child’s development. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the methodology I used to conduct a study of classroom play for children in the upper elementary school grades.
Basicallv, there is only one requirement for research: that you can persuade others that you have indeed made a credible discovery worth paying attention to. (Tesch, 1990, p. 71)

In this chapter I first discuss the reasons why I chose a qualitative methodology to conduct this research. Since my dual roles as both researcher and teacher might very well have prejudiced my findings and analysis, I spend considerable time outlining the safeguards I took to prevent teacher bias. In the section entitled Research Design, I describe the setting and subjects of the study and the techniques I employed to collect the data and analyze them. I also explain the ethical considerations I took to ensure the interests of the children who were involved in my study. Finally, I devote the last part of the chapter to an examination of the validity and reliability of this research.

The Qualitative Paradigm

Essentially, social scientists have two options only for exploring phenomena. The first, quantitative analysis, is the method which has been traditionally used and which has gained acceptance for its preciseness and validity. Quantitative analysis means that through numerical data researchers test hypotheses in an a priori fashion. That is, quantitative researchers adopt deductive reasoning in which “it’s possible to move from general statements to particular which can be objective and independent of
experience" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 17). Quantitative methodology stems from a positivistic, scientific viewpoint which maintains that "the natural sciences provide the only foundation for true knowledge and that the methods, techniques and modes of operation of the natural sciences offer the best framework for investigation of the social world" (Glaser & Strauss, p. 17). Specifically, Hopkins elucidates the quantitative approach to education when he says:

Research in education is usually carried out within the psycho-statistical research paradigm. This implies tightly controlled experimentation and the testing of hypotheses by assessing the effectiveness of a treatment across randomly selected groups through the use of statistical analysis. This approach is based on the agricultural research designs of R. A. Fisher (1935) in the 1930s... The basic idea underlying Fisher's designs is that experiments are conducted on samples, usually divided into a control and an experimental group with the results generalized to the target population. (1993, p. 38)

The second approach to studying social science is the qualitative model.

Unfortunately, trying to define qualitative methodology is almost as problematic as trying to define play. The former has been equated with terms such as ethnography, phenomenology, naturalistic inquiry, and a host of others. One reason for the lack of consensus with respect to qualitative methodology has to do with the fact that this form of research has been conducted across a number of disciplines including sociology, psychology, and education. "Some terms describe the perspectives qualitative researchers adopt (for instance, naturalistic, interpretive, experiential, clinical), or the tradition in the field on which they base their stance (such as ethnography, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, or ethnomethodology)" (Tesch, 1990, p. 58). Tesch maintains, for instance, that ethnography is "synonymous with qualitative research in American education" (1990, p. 45) while Schofield and Anderson inform
us that “qualitative research [is] often referred to by others as naturalistic research or even ethnography” (1984, p. 5).

Regardless of the exact term one chooses to use, qualitative research “attempts to understand a social situation and to derive hypotheses from that effort of appreciation” (Hopkins, 1993, p. 43). It differs from quantitative research in several crucial respects. First, whereas quantitative researchers compile data numerically, qualitative researchers deal with words. Secondly, in contrast to the hypothetico-deductive model used with quantitative research, qualitative investigators do not begin their study with any preordained hypothesis which they then test against their data. Instead, qualitative researchers adopt inductive methods to generate grounded theory which is thought to emerge from the data themselves.

Hopkins believes that although research in education has usually been conducted through the use of a quantitative, positivist paradigm, that does not necessarily mean that we should adopt this methodology when we conduct research in schools. He contends that “it is extraordinarily difficult to draw random samples in educational settings” and that “there are a myriad of contextual variables operating on schools and classrooms [such as teacher personality and socio-economic background] that would affect the results” (1993, p. 39). Moreover, Hopkins contends, the quantitative approach does not suit the study of classrooms because “we are concerned with the individual progress of students rather than with aggregated scores from the class or school” (p. 39). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, he believes that the teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions which are so vital for learning to occur “are not so much the consequence of a standardized teaching method but the result of both teachers and pupils engaging in meaningful action. And meaningful action cannot be standardized by control or sample” (p. 40).

Aside from the negative arguments against the use of a quantitative
methodology, a qualitative design was employed for this study for several other reasons. In order to learn how play affected schoolchildren of the ages nine to eleven, I felt that I needed to gain insight into the pupils' appreciation of the programme. Therefore, I opted for a methodology whose purpose was "to understand the perspective and the experience of people associated with a program" (Patton, 1983, p. 246). By the same token I was undertaking an ethnographic approach to my research insofar as I was learning about a particular culture, specifically that of upper elementary schoolchildren. Furthermore, as a classroom teacher whose responsibility included the care of 25 or more children, I realized that I would not be able to alter the environment in any artificial way to accommodate my study. A qualitative methodology is conducive, then, to this form of inquiry because it is naturalistic "in that it does not attempt to manipulate the research setting" (Patton, 1983, p. 41).

The idea of accessing children's perspectives is compatible with the theoretical perspective which underlies qualitative methodology, namely phenomenology. The phenomenologist:

views human behavior - what people say and do - as a product of how people interpret their world. The task for the phenomenologist is to capture this process of interpretation. . . . To do so requires what Weber called "verstehen", empathic understanding or an ability to reproduce in one's own mind the feelings, motives and thoughts behind the actions of others. In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behavior, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view. (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13)

By adopting an ethnographic methodology for my research I was also employing "an attitude or frame of mind which embodies a certain orientation towards investigating schools and classrooms" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 35). Hitchcock and Hughes have argued that this approach is favourable because it helps:
bridge the gulf between so-called pure, academic research and the everyday realities of teaching. ... [it] reduces the distance between 'research' and 'subject.' Indeed the subjects themselves become part of the research and can in fact help the researcher by actually doing the research themselves. (p. 35)

Moreover, they maintain that "teachers can simultaneously remain teachers and researchers by adopting this approach" (p. 36).

Thus far, I have delineated the reasons for adopting a qualitative, ethnographic, interpretative research design. Action research is also a term which embodies all the attributes of these previously mentioned methodologies. But action research also connotes one key factor which does not predominate in the other models; namely the intention to study a practice as a means to understand it and improve it. Specifically within the classroom, an action research approach requires that teachers embark on a process of inquiry and reflection of their own practice in order to increase their understanding of the classroom. Since teachers spend much of their time doing ethnographic work anyway through "observing, listening, [and] seeking to understand pupils and colleagues" (Woods, 1986, p. 20) it is only a small step to turn their work into a more systematic form of research. However, because of the teacher's unique position of already being "a player in the field" there are some precautions which require elaboration.

**Teacher Bias**

Although the teacher is in an ideal position to conduct research within the classroom, nevertheless, there are inherent concerns. Specifically, there is the danger that, because of his prior training and experience, a teacher will research the issue under consideration with preconceived notions already in mind. For this reason Bogdan and Taylor have recommended that "researchers choose settings in which the
subjects are strangers and in which they have no particular knowledge or expertise” (1975, p. 26). Unlike the usual sociological researcher who enters the field with an open mind, however, the classroom teacher who researches an activity related to his programme runs the risk of interpreting data according to his own feelings, attitudes, and emotions which he has acquired during his years of experience. Despite the fact that Glaser and Strauss maintain that “the researcher can and should study an area without any preconceived theory” (1967, p. 33), a teacher who conducts an inquiry of study within his own classroom makes that position untenable. In an attempt to be mindful of this precaution, Altrichter and Posch have said that, since it is impossible to ignore one’s prior thoughts, “reflecting on one’s own theoretical preconceptions when starting research is a ‘conditio sine qua non’ for teacher research. It facilitates the definition and clarification of a starting point for research and enables the researcher to select carefully the data needed” (1989, p. 23). They conclude that:

Teacher researchers cannot enter their field of research in an unprejudiced manner (unlike sociologists who might enter fields they are unfamiliar with) because they already live and work in it . . . Rather than disregarding these “prejudices” teacher researchers should take them into account, use them, elaborate and revise them by their research. (p. 26)

One means through which teachers can maintain an equilibrium is to keep a log or journal throughout their inquiries. There, it is possible to record their reservations about their interpretations in light of prejudices which become apparent as they reflect about their data. “The fieldwork journal or diary is the place where the researcher, in conversation with herself, can record hopes, fears, confusion and enlightenment. It is the place where the personal side of the fieldwork equation can be recorded” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 69). With this in mind, I wrote many entries (labelled JN followed by the date) which expressed my doubts and difficulties with my investigation.
For instance, at one point I expressed my exasperation with a group of girls who were trying to put on a skit but who were being so noisy and silly that, in my estimation, very little of anything worthwhile was taking place ("The children went in and out of role constantly. I didn't really know what to do about it and still don't"). For quite some time I had been perturbed by the amount of noise and bickering which occurred as a large number of children did drama. My first instincts to intervene were countered with the notion that play is concerned with the process and not the product. It was through this kind of constant reflection that I was able to provide the children with the latitude to continue their play without my intervention.

In my journal I also contemplated future directions for other forms of involvement in the students' play ("Occasionally one of the boys interjected a comment. I think perhaps he would like to participate but he didn't know how [to make entry]. . . . This is where I might be able to intervene to make his involvement possible"). The journal allowed me to reflect on the play practices and make modifications if I felt they were necessary ("Those centers that are rarely chosen seem to be pattern blocks, puzzles and plasticine"). It allowed me to ruminate on my own play as a child ("When I think about outdoor play I think of the hours I myself spent in front of my house throwing a tennis ball against the steps") and compare it to the play of children today. In retrospect, perhaps the greatest value of the journal was that it allowed me to voice my doubts and frustrations of my project. For instance, in one of my early entries when I was still trying to connect children's play with the academic curriculum, I wrote:

I think that I blew a great opportunity to capitalize on children's play today. Rajvinder came up to me and showed me a splendid piece of plasticine that he had made into a genie and a snake. I commented on the splendidness of the detail but I did not ask him any questions that might have taken him further, perhaps into reading about genies and discovering their history. To me that
would have been extending his play and combining it with some research. If he had chosen to do so, so much the better. Simply because the prop would be a book or encyclopedia does not for me negate the value of the play. . . . But according to Saracho this intervention would have been what she calls "redirecting." Hence, the play would be devalued.

It was this sort of reasoning which eventually steered my research away from the connections between play and academic achievement.

Research Design

Background

I originally set out to discover the extent of play's influence on children in the Junior Division in the fall of 1992. At that time, as I have explained in the Introduction, I was interested in examining the relationship between play and the academic, social, and emotional development of my students. After a great deal of soul-searching and frustration, I decided that I could not satisfactorily link play to academic learning. In part, I reached that conclusion because of the limitations of the definition of play. Some educators such as Stone (1995/96) and Wassermann (1992) have written about the value of play in the acquisition of academic skills but, to my way of thinking, they are using structured as opposed to spontaneous play as their criteria. In the case of structured play, teachers remain in control of the learning activity and thus, they can manipulate the activities to cover the curriculum. On the other hand, when children play spontaneously, they are the ones who control the activity and, when this is the case, the teacher does not have the opportunity to direct the activity in such a way that it suits his agenda. For this reason, spontaneous play does not easily lend itself to academic learning. Not having understood this distinction at the time, I often found
myself giving children the opportunity to play spontaneously and then trying to ask them questions which took them away from their play. I was only finally able to comprehend this dilemma by maintaining a journal in which I recorded my thoughts and reflected on my successes and failures with the play programme. For several years I maintained this personal journal in which I would log my observations, my feelings, and, especially, my reservations about this project.

In order to gain approval for the inclusion of play as part of my classroom programme, I obtained a written sanction from my principal at that time, a copy of which is listed under Appendix A. After my thesis committee at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education approved my proposal in the summer of 1995, I began formal data collection during that fall. Since I was then currently employed in a new school, it was necessary to gain authorization for a second time from the administration to embark on my research. At the same time a letter (tabled under Appendix B) was sent home with each student requesting parental consent for their children's participation in this research project.

Setting

This study was conducted in a large, multiethnic elementary school located in the southeast corner of North York, Ontario. The closed classroom consisted of 25 Grade 5 pupils from a number of diverse cultural, racial, religious, and language backgrounds including those from Somalia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Jamaica, India, Pakistan, and Canada. Each week, for a period of never less than 45 minutes and not much more than one hour, the students were permitted to pursue their own line of interest. The list of activities included: sand, water, painting, plasticine, drama, art, building, games, and puzzles. Each month the class would convene to discuss the play period and decide how it might be improved. During these discussions the
students would make suggestions as to what might be added to our list of possibilities. Depending on the views of the class and mindful of financial considerations, we would add to the choices of activities periodically. In this respect the children came to feel that they had a vested interest in the play period since they contributed significant input to its success. The students were made quite aware that they were subjects in a research project and perhaps it was for this reason that they did not resent having to write accounts of their activities after they had completed the play sessions. That, possibly, and the fact that I also joined them in writing up my own perceptions of the play period precluded any unwillingness to respond to this request. And if I was not modelling for them the same activity that I was asking them to emulate, then I would be interviewing several students about that day's play. For these reasons I did not seem to encounter any great amount of opposition when I asked the students to write up their reports. Those children who had recently immigrated and whose facility with the language did not enable them to respond satisfactorily were asked to try and illustrate what they had done during the play session. During the monthly play discussions I would sometimes read an anonymous entry from several of the children's play diaries. At those times I would try to point out how important it was to try to be as specific and detailed as possible in their recounts of the play activities.

Although I had pondered the possibility of limiting my focus of attention to a small number of "key informants," I soon discovered that I would be doing greater justice to my study if all the children in the class were included in my observations and interpretations. I did not want to limit my research simply to those children who were the most articulate and the most coherent. I realized that their experiences were no more important than anyone else's, including those who did not have the capacity for writing or speaking fluent English. In fact, I felt that had I restricted myself to a study of just a few individuals, my study would not have the same level of validity or reliability.
as an all-encompassing inquiry. Moreover, after reading the written reports of some children whom I would not have originally chosen as key informants, I learned that every single child had significant insights to contribute. Even those children who spoke a minimal amount of English had their own stories to tell and from their accounts, either in words or pictures, and through my own observations, I was able to glean valuable information. As well, I wanted the class to feel that we were participating in this investigation together. I did not want to compromise my frankness with them by pretending that I was interested in everyone's ideas while I was really only concerned with just a few people's opinions.

Data Collecting Techniques

In order to understand the play programme and how children felt about it, I decided to employ a strategy which has been described as being conducive to classroom study, namely participant observation. As Patton has said, "To understand fully the complexities of many program situations, direct participation in and observation of the program may be the best evaluation method" (1983, p. 49). Later, he adds, "Participant observation is an omnibus field strategy in that it simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observations, and introspection" (p. 127). By using this technique a researcher is able to gain insights about the programme under study since it helps to answer the following questions:

1) What do people do in the program?
2) How do they experience the program?
3) What is it like to be a participant in the program?
4) What would one see if one were watching the program in progress? (Patton, p. 142)
As the classroom teacher I was in a position to take field notes of the children while they were engaged in their play. Yet, I knew that this technique was limited for several reasons. First, it was only possible to focus on one child or a small group of children for any one particular play period. Meanwhile, I would be missing out on important information with respect to the rest of the class. Secondly, my own observations would allow me to gain an “outsider’s” perspective, but they would not enable me to gain an understanding from the participants’ points of view. To solve these problems, I also adopted two other techniques. Qualitative interviewing enabled me to gain insights into the children’s feelings about their play and allowed me to validate my own observations of the particular play episode for that day. Moreover, it imparted to the students recognition and respect that their feelings and ideas had meaning. For this reason the classroom climate was also improved (Hopkins, 1993, p. 122). Since I had only a limited amount of time to do the interviewing (approximately fifteen minutes after the play session was completed) I adopted a format which combined structured and open-ended questions. I framed the questions so that children could respond readily and satisfactorily to my research concerns. Although the amount of time allotted for the interviews was brief, especially compared to other qualitative studies, nevertheless, it sufficed more than adequately for my purposes. Since most children had rarely been interviewed previously, I had to overcome their initial skittishness. I managed to make them comfortable by having them listen to themselves on tape and allowing them to laugh at hearing themselves and their classmates. Then, by asking introductory, straightforward questions such as “What activity did you do today?” I was able to lead the children through the interview quickly and efficiently. Once I had posed structured questions and everyone had had an opportunity to respond, I began to ask more open-ended, thought-provoking questions such as “What did you like (or not like) about what you did today?” My questions soon reflected the responses of the children
so that by the end of the interview a dialogue had ensued. Throughout the interview I tried to make responding as easy and natural as possible by remembering to follow Singer’s advice for adults as they interview children:

It is often possible to obtain relatively clear reports from them [children] of their own characteristic tendencies provided that the questions are relatively uncomplicated and that the interviewer shows some sensitivity and skill throwing out only a limited number of probes to be certain that sufficient data have been obtained. (1973, p. 59)

One advantage I found to interviewing several children at once was that one child’s response would often trigger further discussion from another. In this way I was able to gather a richness of details about that particular play episode. At times, when children’s responses reflected a difference in their perceptions, I would probe to clarify the reasons for the divergence of opinion. Thus, I was also ensuring that my findings were valid. The interviews which were conducted with an audiotape while I took written notes were then transcribed and labelled IN followed by the child’s name and date of the interview. (An example of one such transcript can be found in Appendix C.)

In order to access the perspectives of all the children I also asked them to write up individual accounts of each play episode. Hitchcock and Hughes have said that "first hand accounts of children's and pupils' experiences collected by the teacher can throw light on a whole range of issues and demonstrate the value of this kind of research" (1989, p. 110). They also caution us, however, that “the idea of children as informants raises methodological issues as well as moral and ethical ones. . . . The whole issue would seem to surround taking children seriously” (p.63). Although some traditional researchers may have difficulty using children as informants in a sociological study of this sort, nevertheless, there are valid reasons why we should accept them and even welcome them as contributors to the study. David Jackson has
argued the merits of using children as respondents in classroom studies when he stated:

It seems to me that many conventional research accounts of classrooms are out of touch with children and their spontaneous use of language when they feel valued. As well as giving a greater sense of authenticity the freshness and immediacy of details . . . often stand a greater chance of engaging the reader’s attention than a more formal, abstract account. This is one reason why children’s voices need to be given greater space. Also, many descriptions of classroom experience leave out children’s perceptions of what’s going on. Through contrasting their own versions with children’s comments, teachers can often learn more about the reasons behind classroom failures and successes. . . . It is a pity that children’s evaluative descriptions of classroom experience are often neglected. By writing their own comments on a topic and adopting a collaborative style of learning pupils have a chance to give an “on the receiving end” version of what happened that often works as a frank and sobering corrective to teachers’ “rosier accounts”. (1981, pp. 58,59)

These documentary accounts of the children were kept in a loose-leaf diary for each child and were labelled DN followed by the child’s name and date. (A copy of two such entries can be found in Appendix D.)

My own field notes were usually written after the play session at the same time that the children were writing their own diary notes and when I was not interviewing. Initially, I attempted to make notes as the children were involved in the play and to a certain extent I maintained that practice throughout my data collection. However, I inevitably found that I would be interrupted by children who required materials or those who would ask me to look at something they were doing (at the sandbox for instance) or occasionally those who asked me to join them in their play. Although I had to rely on
my memory I felt that I could do more justice to my findings if I simply wrote
uninterrupted at the same time that the students did, following the play periods. These
notes (a copy of which can be found in Appendix E) were designated FN followed by
the date.

In addition to these techniques, I also used my aforementioned journal to make entries (which were labelled JN followed by the date). (A copy of one such entry is located in Appendix F.)

Data Analysis

During the course of data collection I would often reread my journal entries
which included a collection of field notes and observer's comments. As I read I would try to summarize in one word what my notes were telling me. I was, in effect, beginning to conceptualize my data. Thus, I had unwittingly begun the process of constant comparison which, Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain, leads to the formation of grounded theory. Once the data collection was complete and through the comparison of one unit of information with the next, I eventually developed a list of almost sixty categories from my field notes, journal, interview transcripts, and documentary sources (children's accounts). In order to make sense of my data I kept returning to the questions which Patton recommended for programme research (previously mentioned under the section "Data Collection") and trying to conceptualize all of the pertinent data. Through sifting, integrating, and synthesizing, I was eventually able to discern thirteen regularly recurring patterns or themes, a summary of which constitutes the next chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Since I was using children as my subjects and informants, I felt the need to use
special precautions to “protect the particular interests of especially vulnerable participants in the setting” (Erickson F., 1986, p. 141). To guard against any encroachments which they or their parents thought might violate their privacy, I heeded the advice of Hitchcock and Hughes who say that “the principles of confidentiality and anonymity can resolve many of the ethical dilemmas the teacher researcher may find herself in” (1989, p. 48). Thus, instead of referring to persons by name, I have adopted the use of pseudonyms throughout this report.

In some respects a classroom teacher has a great deal of latitude as far as teaching the curriculum is concerned. He does not normally have to account for how his class spends every minute of the school day. Nevertheless, since I was using a good hour of the school week for a research study involving the use of play, I felt an obligation to have my administrators endorse this project and use of school time. I wanted to know that my principals felt that my motives were above reproach and in the interest of the children as well as myself. For this reason I asked three administrators to come into the class during the period designated for play, make observations, and then decide whether my project was justified. As the letter published under Appendix A will attest, approval was given and the research study was heartily encouraged.

Validity

According to Eisenhart and Howe:

the validity of an educational research study regardless of the research design used, can be determined by how carefully the study is designed, conducted and presented; how sensitively it treats human subjects or how it well it contributes to important educational issues including debates about educational theory and practice. (as cited in Eisenhart & Borko, 1993, p. 93)

They maintain that there are five standards related to carrying out a valid study. The
first states that “in order that a study’s contribution can be fairly judged, [the] assumptions and goals embedded in the development and conduct of that study must be made explicit and justified” (p. 95). Furthermore, they quote from Peshkin in cautioning the reader that “subjectivities must be made explicit if they are to advance . . . the validity of research” (p. 96). In this respect I have tried to be as candid as possible in clarifying any biases that I may have brought with me to this study. In order to be as objective as possible, I intentionally did not consult the literature prior to and during preliminary analysis of the data. One must understand, however, as I pointed out in the section “Teacher Bias” that when one researches the field in which one has background knowledge, it is impossible to be totally objective. To ensure impartiality in the collection of data and its analysis, one must come to terms with that bias and not allow it to interfere with the task. Once, however, this has been acknowledged, the level of validity can be as great as when a sociologist ventures into a foreign field, because the researcher will overcompensate in trying to remain unprejudiced.

The second criterion that Eisenhart and Howe advance is that “the data collection and the data analysis procedures ought to fit, or be suitable for answering the research questions asked” (p. 93). Originally I set out in my research to answer the following questions:

1) What is it that the children do when they are allowed to pursue their own choice of activity within the confines of the classroom?
2) What behaviors are identifiable as the children play?
3) How do the children themselves feel about their play?
4) In what ways does the play contribute to the well-being of the child?
5) Are the contributions of play compatible with the goals of the school?

Observation of children is a large part of the teacher’s responsibility, but many teachers, myself included, often find it difficult to document much of what they see.
Forcing myself to put down on paper my observations and reflections not only helped me complete this research but it also helped me to do a better job teaching. By focusing on a small group of children at any one point, I was able to identify their interests and behaviors. Through qualitative interviewing and from reading their personal accounts, I was able to understand the children's own perceptions. In this sense then, I was able to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 196). Through analysis of the data and reflecting on the influence of play in this manuscript, I have been able to address the last two research questions.

Eisenhart and Howe state that “research studies qua arguments cannot be valid without credible reasons for a specific choice of subjects and competent application of data-gathering procedures and analysis techniques” (as cited in Eisenhart & Borko, 1993, p. 93). My data-collecting techniques which included the taking of field notes, qualitative interviewing, and solicited documentary sources are consistent with the participant observation strategy which is used in much qualitative research including that within schools and classrooms. Similarly, I have analyzed my data and drawn my conclusions according to the procedures which are recommended by renowned qualitative researchers including Glaser and Strauss (1967), Bogdan and Taylor (1975), and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) among others.

Fourthly, Eisenhart and Howe state that “valid research studies qua arguments must include discussion of values, that is, the importance or usefulness of the study and its risks. The conduct of educational research is subject to both ‘external’ and ‘internal’ value constraints” (1993, p. 102). With respect to external value constraints, this study is important in the improvement of educational practice for reasons which I have discussed in Chapter One. To recapitulate briefly, early childhood education is largely based on child development whereas elementary school education is geared to achievement. My argument is based on the conjecture that one cannot expect
academic prowess from many children if attention is not paid to other aspects as well, such as social and emotional concerns. Play is one means by which these concerns can be addressed. Thus, the conclusions arising from this thesis would lead one to advance the cause of play for older children and compel a change in educational practice by accepting the importance of play and allowing for its inclusion.

By “internal validity” Eisenhart and Howe are referring to research ethics. They are concerned with “the way research is conducted vis-a-vis research subjects.” As I have previously discussed, I took a number of measures in order to protect the privacy and interests of the children who were involved in this study including securing parental permission and endorsement of the project by school administrators. Most importantly, I confided in the students themselves who joined with me in becoming co-collaborators in the completion of this research inquiry.

Eisenhart and Howe’s final criterion for a valid study is concerned with comprehensiveness. They refer to “triangulation by theory” to account for the validity of a theoretical explanation. For them, “a study, competently and ethically conceived and conducted, can be considered comprehensive if its results and their explanation can stand up to the challenge posed by other explanations” (as cited in Eisenhart & Borko, 1993, p. 108). To ensure as accurate and objective an analysis and set of conclusions as possible, I used three sets of comparative data. My own field notes and journal entries were compared to the transcriptions of the interviews and narrative accounts of the students. Narrative accounts reporting on a play incident involving more than one child were also compared one against the other in order to gain as accurate a picture as possible. During interviews with several children who were involved in the same play experience, different viewpoints were expressed, then questioned, and eventually clarified in an effort to arrive at a “real” depiction of events. By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and documentary analysis I was able “to validate and
cross-check evaluation findings. . . [This] multimethods approach to field-work increases both the validity and reliability of evaluation data" (Patton, 1983, p. 157).

Another consideration is that which positivists would refer to as reliability and which qualitative researchers see as "representativeness." Essentially, this is a measure of whether "the extent to which the situations, individuals, or groups investigated are typical or representative of the situations, individuals or group as a whole" (Hopkins, 1993, p. 123). Since research was conducted in a substantive setting, I cannot say with any certainty that my results would be duplicated in another setting with another researcher. Much of a qualitative researcher's study is determined by the predispositions of the researcher himself. In the case of action research, where the teacher is also the researcher, this is never more the case. However, insofar as I have used sound qualitative data collection and data analysis procedures I feel confident about the generalization of my findings. Moreover, since this study was done in a naturalistic setting, there was no attempt to manipulate the data to produce a certain result. Finally, and most significantly, many of my preliminary observations and the tentative conclusions I have drawn were done in a number of different settings. Although the vast bulk of data was accumulated during the school year beginning in September of 1995, I had made observations and reached tentative hypotheses based on my previous classes in two other schools. Although each class was unique, nevertheless, there were similarities with all. In trying to justify the validity and reliability of my findings, I quite often refer to the advice of Elizabeth Burge who wrote:

The underlying question that summarized for me all of the above criteria [with respect to validity and reliability] is one of authenticity: have I represented accurately the perceptions of the participants, taken account of my own biases, and produced descriptions and interpretations that are relevant to those perceptions. (1993, p. 56)
In this chapter I have accounted for the use of a qualitative model to conduct this research. I have outlined qualitative procedures I used for collecting the data, for analysis, and for judging its “trustworthiness.” I have also described the setting for the study, its participants, and ethical considerations which needed to be addressed. The next chapter consists of the first level of analysis; namely, the depiction of the regularly occurring patterns or themes which emerged from the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

THEMES

The business of getting to the true version of what you have found in your research involves sifting through data, seeing and seeing again the truths underlying the busy-ness [sic] of classroom life. (Hubbard & Power, 1993, p. 30)

The first part of the analysis involved the constant comparison of the data. Each item was read and labelled with a heading which denoted the meaning of that particular piece of data. In most instances more than one heading was designated to each item of data. In those cases, the item was filed into more than just one category. Ultimately, each bit of data was coded and filed under the appropriate heading until the categories became “saturated,” that is, any further data would not add any more pertinent information to the category. After further sorting, integration, and reflection, the sixty categories were ultimately reduced to the following thirteen themes:

1. The influence of play upon E.S.L. children
2. Play enables low-achieving children to help others
3. Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success, and self-esteem
4. The effects of play on classroom climate
5. Play gives rise to fantasies of aggression
6. Social aspects of play
7. Play is a learning device
8. Play facilitates cooperation

9. Play facilitates creativity, imagination and the expression of fantasies

10. Playing is fun and therefore it helps bring about a positive attitude towards school.

11. The influence of gender on play

12. Play enables children to deal with frustration and disappointment in a positive manner.

13. Play enables children to make things for others.

1. The influence of play upon E.S.L. children

(i) Play helped establish bonds of friendship among children who could not communicate well in English.

   It was noted that E.S.L. children played in a solitary manner at building, painting, or doing cut and paste with junk materials. After a variable length of time during which the E.S.L. children became accustomed to school and routines, they also became involved in games with children during the time designated for play. One child, Mehendan, who had arrived at the school from Afghanistan halfway during the school year, was observed to have played only by himself during the weekly play sessions. Mehendan was extremely shy and reticent and if he did speak it was usually only one or two words at a time. Eventually, as recalled by a classmate in the following play anecdote, Mehendan finally began to interact with someone else during one of the play activities: “Yesterday I was working on the computer with my friend named Mehendan. We were playing Wheel of Fortune. Mehendan went first. He got one letter then after he didn’t get it when it was my turn I got a lot of letters (DN,Sundip, May 19).

   In another instance, Peter remarks that he had fun playing Connect Four with
Yusuf, a recent arrival from Ethiopia who could only communicate his participation in play through pictures ("I was playing with Yusuf we had fun" [DN, Peter, November 11]). Through these two episodes we can see that play facilitates communication among students even when they do not speak the same language and helps foster friendships for those children.

(ii) Play allows those children who do not socialize with others because of language differences to function independently and feel successful.

The following diagrams attest to the ability of one newly-arrived child from Ethiopia to play independently even though he had only a limited knowledge of English.
Friday December 15

Toby is November 22 1995
Each of these illustrations indicates that Yusuf used the play periods in constructive ways. Whether by building with Tinkertoy materials, practising string tricks, or creating with junk, Yusuf was able to demonstrate independence during all of the play periods.

In my observations I noted that a boy named Paul, who had transferred from another school quite recently and who also had little facility with English, "found a temporary niche [at the plasticine center] by building a varied assortment of monsters from Clayola" (FN, November 28). In fact, Paul and I stored his characters in a special place in the classroom so that he could add to his collection weekly.

Another child, Arthur, a recent arrival from Pakistan, spent hours of focused, uninterrupted play as he assembled puzzles and made constructions from lego materials. In all three cases the students would express their satisfaction with their accomplishments by showing me what they had done and smiling at my acknowledgement.

(iii) Only during these play occasions was the E.S.L. child capable of being on an equal footing with the others in the class.

Ordinarily, E.S.L. students, particularly those who have only recently arrived in Canada, are extremely dependent on the other children in the class to demonstrate tasks and help them with assignments. During classroom play, however, E.S.L. students exhibited an independence and confidence which they did not otherwise evince. In fact, E.S.L. children who were seen to be proficient at a particular play activity were often asked by others to help them with their activity. This was illustrated when the aforementioned Paul, who the other children had observed to be adept at making plasticine figures, was asked to contribute items of "food" to several girls who were dramatizing a skit about shopping (FN, January 7). Similarly, Baldave, a student who was still receiving E.S.L. instruction was called upon by a classmate to assist him
in painting ("I do [did] not know what to do but Peter said can you help to pint", DN, Baldave, April, 16). That E.S.L. children are able to help others is especially significant because, in almost every other instance in school, it is always the E.S.L. child who is the recipient of assistance. Whenever there is an assignment involving reading, whether it be from a textbook or activity cards, E.S.L. students are almost always teamed with a classmate who can relay the intent of the task to them. In some cases this dependence results in a sense of inferiority and definite lack of confidence. Therefore, the fact that play enables E.S.L. children to assert independence and express proficiency is instrumental in building self-esteem.

(iv) Play enables shy, insecure E.S.L. children to gain confidence.

Mary was a very quiet Somalian child who had attended school in Canada for a year and a half but who had experienced so much difficulty in the acquisition of English and in her general academic performance that psycho-educational testing had been proposed. Mary was only able to print words (rather than use handwriting); her spelling was at an inventive stage (Mae an Kty an rBrt Mae an [unintelligible word] [Me and Katie and Robert made an {unintelligible word}] [DN, Mary, November 11]); her drawings were simplistic, undeveloped and lacked detail; and she would only speak in whispers. Only on two occasions, both of which occurred during play sessions, did I hear Mary raise her voice to what could be described as a normal level; once as she played a game of "31"⁴ on the blackboard with her friend, Katie, another E.S.L. child, and once when she played a math video game on the computer with the same friend (FN, January 7).

⁴ In "31" four sets of magnetized cards with numbers one to six are stuck on the blackboard and each child in turn draws a card, adds the number to the previous total until the winner arrives at 31.)
2. **Play enables low-achieving children to help others**

As in the case of E.S.L. children, pupils who were academically low achievers benefited from their interplay with other children by teaching or demonstrating their proficiency at various games or skills. The following three instances illustrate this point.

Ronald, a boy with below-average reading and writing abilities played a game with Sundip who wrote the following in his play journal: “Today I was playing Connect Four with my friend named Ronald he is really good in connect four he won me 4 times and I won him 3 times” (DN, Sundip, April 24).

Helen was a ten-year-old girl who had serious learning difficulties in all areas owing, in part, to frequent absenteeism. She was slow to grasp new concepts, irresponsible as far as the completion of assignments was concerned, and constantly in need of individual tutoring. She was also isolated by the other girls who excluded her from their play in the class and in the playground. After one play session in which she was partnered at the computer with Zelda, a very capable, confident student who was elected by her classmates as their school representative, Zelda wrote:

Today I played with Helen. We played Wheel of Fortune and I won . . . Then we played a little bit of Hangman. And then we played Billiard Parlour. I did not know how to play but Helen taught me. Now I know how to play if someone else wants to play it (DN, Zelda, April 16).

Baldave was a ten-year-old boy who, though intelligent, lacked the requisite reading and writing skills needed to be successful. Although he was making satisfactory progress with reading, his ability to write was hampered by a lack of unity and coherence. Spelling dictations usually resulted in such low marks that I suggested that he limit the number of words he prepared for to half of what the rest of the class were to study. Yet his friend Thomas commented in his journal that Baldave provided
him with valuable assistance during the play episode for that day: “Today I was at junk
and Baldave was helping on my robot. Now the robot have firepower. The firepower is
not exactaly finished. It was Baldave’s idea to make the firepower” (DN, Thomas, April
9).

In all three cases, low-achieving children were able to help their classmates. In
doing so they attained a degree of success and enhanced their self-esteem.

3. Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success, and self-esteem

Many of the children’s journal entries indicated that they had fun during the
course of the play but few were able to articulate exactly why it was fun. One boy’s
report, however, suggested that what made the activity fun was the fact that he was
able to make something from his own imagination:

The activity was great. The thing that’s so great about it is I made it . . . My
invention you have to use your emarnation [i.e. imagination]. It is so great do
you want me to tell you all about it. You have to jump over it and then
look to see how hey [high] you jump. (DN, Ronald, January 17)

Similarly, Helen’s summary of her play session evoked the enthusiasm and
pride she felt for what she had done: “Today I made a puppet. I did not fanac [finish]it .
But I wated [wanted] to tell you about it. I using a baron paper bag and lots of sparkles
it is looing nice” (DN, Helen, January 17).

The children also felt pleased with themselves when others expressed interest
about what they had done. The following extract illustrated this point:

Today I went to paint with Frances. We made a scribble painting. We made 3 of
the scribble paintings. It was really fun. We made a big mess but we clean it up
after. Everybody was asking how we made it, and that it very nice. (DN, Donna,
January 24)
As the following entry suggests, the idea of winning also inspired pleasure:

“Today I was working at games. I played pickup sticks against Kenneth. I beat him 100 and something to 80 isn't that wonderful!” (DN, Edwin, November 7).

A key doctrine in teaching, we are told, is to ensure the success of every child in the classroom. Despite the best intentions, however, it is extremely difficult to guarantee the success of each individual, especially in today’s philosophical climate which clamours for high achievement as measured by outcomes and standardized testing. One area where success can be attained is in the realm of play. To illustrate this point one need only look at the journal entries and observation reports concerning one particular student who experienced tremendous difficulty with his academic performance, his social relationships, and his behavior.

Allen had a history of recalcitrant behavior and low achievement ever since he had been in kindergarten. Like many children who have difficulty in school, he demonstrated intelligence but he could not apply it, particularly when it came to written assignments. He had trouble with his penmanship and by Grade 5, when the vast majority of students have gained at least a modest facility with handwriting, Allen was still printing. Allen still reversed letters (“thsi” for this); he mixed upper- and lower-case letters; and he still spelled phonetically (“I Did junk metrel agn Be cose I hade to fenc of the towr that I am makeing and I have not fenst it eat But I am vare colos to fenching it”. ["I did junk material again because I had to finish off the tower that I am making and I have not finished it yet."] [DN, Allen, November 22]). Allen was constantly in conflict with others in the playground and his behavior in the community (throwing leaflets around the street just outside the front of the school and shooting peas at windshields of passing cars at the neighbourhood mall) was mischievous and harmful. Homework assignments were often forgotten or simply not completed. He would forever fidget and try to draw attention to himself during stories and discussions.
When he read aloud and realized that he had made a mistake he would shake his head back and forth as if he were trying to eradicate what he had said. In short, Allen was a very demanding child who had given all his previous teachers a great deal of grief and problems. Despite my own difficulties with him, Allen did experience some positive experiences during the term especially when it came to play. His own comments confirmed this conclusion:

“I like what I did Becos it looks net [neat].” (DN, Allen, November 7)
“I had a lot of fun making it.” (DN, Allen, November 14)
“I played and I have alote of fun and we wrke togater and we hade a lote of fun. I made a small man out of some gugle ise and stire some Ball and some paipclenr [pipe cleaners] and poot some coten Bales [cotton balls] on hem and I made a nose out of Buntens and I hade allot of fun.” (DN, Allen, January 17)

Despite the fact that he was continually becoming involved in disputes with other youngsters at recess, Allen was able to get along quite well with his classmates during the time devoted to classroom play. As the following excerpts, written by his own colleagues, indicate, Allen was able to foster friendships during these play episodes:

“My activity I did was great and I had a great friend (i.e. Allen) to do it with and he is sometime bat and sometime good.” (DN, Ronald, February 22)
“I made a plane but my friend Allen made a better one.” (DN, Ronald, February 15)

In contrast to the conflicts he had in the playground he demonstrated cooperation with his classmates during play sessions as the following selections imply:

“Today I was playing with the junk. I tried to make something with popsicle sticks but I messed up but next time I will try to make it with Allen.” (DN, Ernest, April 3)
“I used junk today to make my ship. I made a ship using popsicle sticks. I
worked with Allen and Allen made a tower with popsicle sticks." (DN, Edwin, November 17)

"Yesterday I was working on string with Allen and Sundip. The string got tangled it was hard to unwind it. Then we found how to take the string without tangling it." (DN, Kenneth, April 11)

As opposed to his usual pattern of avoiding work, particularly that which necessitated writing, and distracting others, Allen became engrossed with his play and would often attend to whatever he was doing for lengthy periods of time without misbehaving. The following comments, which I wrote after several play episodes, suggest just how involved and well-behaved Allen was during these activities:

"Allen chose to build a house with popsicle sticks. For one hour he was busily engaged with it. The only time I yelled during the entire afternoon was when I asked them to report about the activity and he was talking." (FN, November 8)

"For 45 minutes Allen sat with Ronald at plasticine and made a model airplane/shuttle. I wasn’t on his case once; he simply sat there, talked with Ronald and did it." (FN, May 31)

"Allen went to the plasticine center today with Ronald. The only time I heard him speak out was when he exclaimed ‘my ears’ when several of the girls practised their recorder music." (FN, May 17)

Lastly, unlike the frustration and exasperation which Allen seemed to feel during most of the school day, he was able to derive feelings of success, pride, and pleasure through his play. The following quotations by Allen himself reflected these sentiments:

"I usde the computers today and I made a pect weath all of the little stape fegrse on the computer and I pate a trane on me peer I rele tink it is grate" ["I used the computers today and I made a picture with all of the little (unintelligible) figures on the computer and I put a train on my (unintelligible). I
really think it is great.”] (DN, Allen, November 24)

"I was playing with playdowe and I hade made a air plane out of the playdowe it took me alotof time to do that it trunde it looked rely good." ["I was playing with playdough and I had made an airplane out of the playdough. It took me a lot of time to do that. It turned it looked really good.”] (DN, Allen, May 17)

"To day I made my srisrape that I didnt fench stel I didnt fench it to day and it is all rade tall and I like it allot and frande E. Hz made a Bote ot of pske steks it rele looks good in a wae.” ["Today I made my skyscraper that I didn't finish. Still I didn’t finish it today and it is already tall and I like it a lot and friend Ernest and Harry made a boat of popsicle sticks. It really looks good in a way.”] (DN, Allen, November 17)

4. The Effects of Play on Classroom Climate

Classroom climate is a term which is used to reflect the general tone within the class. Several factors which affected the climate and which seem to have been influenced by the play sessions were: i) atmosphere; ii) management; and iii) the teacher-pupil relationship.

i) Atmosphere

If one were to walk into the classroom during a play session one would first be left with the impression that children were busily engaged in a number of activities such as painting, plasticine, the sandbox, building, and the computer. One might in fact have wondered if she had ventured onto the wrong floor since very few Junior Division classrooms provide an easel for painting, not to mention a sandbox and water table.

As the following field notes (January 17) attested, there would be laughter:

Aaron to George (while playing a game of Monopoly): “I’ll give you this for all of
Aaron to Janet: “You have to pay me 18 dollars . . . Thank you. You’re a ripoff, you know.”

Janet to Aaron: “You’re supposed to give me 100 dollars.”

(Laughter by all four.)

Despite the fact that there was confrontation the children were able to laugh at the circumstances. Another instance of laughter was recorded in the following play extract by a student who was at the computer with two of her classmates: “All three of us started to play Hangman. We were playing fine when this name came on the screen. When I read the name out I found out that the name was verdi. All three of us started to laugh at the name” (DN, Carol, March 27).

There may or may not be a high level of noise. As I remarked in my journal on more than one occasion, there tended to be excessive noise at times. On the other hand, the noise would often subside into lulls which were so incongruous with the setting that I once wrote, “The children are so engrossed in their activity that it is strangely quiet” (JN, May 7). When the level of noise was high, particularly if a group was doing drama, I noted that it was noise “created from a buzz of activity and not from acting out” (JN, May 7).

There was also a good deal of movement since children were not confined to any particular desk or area and if they needed materials they would walk to where they could find them. If a child was no longer interested in continuing with what she had started, she could move to wherever she wanted to go.

There was also an air of playfulness in the content and manner in which the children carried out their activity. The following extract from my notes illustrated this playfulness:

The players took on roles of routines in the school including opening
announcements and singing the national anthem. Apparently the play involved a teacher who was constantly annoyed by some bad kids in the class who would pull stunts like pulling the chair out from behind someone who had stood to answer a question and singing the tune “Let’s Talk About Sex” instead of “O Canada.” The “teacher” would then rebuke them with comments such as “I don’t appreciate your behavior” [said in a very haughty tone]. (FN, April 24)

ii) Management

As I have previously mentioned, the noise level of the class during play sessions could turn quite loud. Yet during the play periods I rarely seemed to take on the role of a policeman who would watch the children and try to catch them doing something they were not supposed to be doing. This observation is referred to in a passage from my own journal which I had written after considering one typical play episode:

Far too often I am too concerned with the fact that children are not doing what I want them to do whether it be their writing or their sketching or another assignment. The nicest thing about the time given over to play is that I rarely am perturbed about their behavior. I guess that is because their behavior is generally good during that time and that is because they’re doing what they want to do. (JN, February 21)

This reflection implies that play is a very effective management tool. It encourages good collective behavior because it enables the students to do something that they want to do without being coerced or cajoled.

The following entry, also from my own journal, expressed my exasperation with the behavior of one individual and the ensuing relief I felt after one particular play session:
This has been an awful week with Allen. He constantly misbehaves. His work is not done or it is lost. I’m finding it difficult to work with him on a one-to-one basis. I feel that not only does he take up my time which others could be using but furthermore, what is the point? Any work which I do with him is a waste - it’s either not done or it’s forgotten. I had so much trouble containing my emotions with him this week that I even sent him to the office two days in a row. That is why I was heartened by the play activity we had today. For 45 minutes Allen sat with Ronald at plasticine and made a model airplane/shuttle. I wasn’t on his case once; he simply sat there, conversed with Ronald and did it. At the end of the session he showed me (of his own volition) what he had done and then he took it home. This was the only time during the course of the whole week that he seemed to enjoy any success at all. (JN, May 31)

The behavior of other individuals, particularly those children who might be characterized as reluctant learners, was also seen to improve during bouts of play. The following extract describes two such boys and how their usual behavior was modified by classroom play:

Kulbir and Cory played uninterrupted and engrossed in the sand for the full 45 minute activity session. They did not use any accessory materials except for adding some water... both of them seemed oblivious to what was going on around them. It is worth noting that both of these boys are recalcitrant learners. One has so much difficulty writing that every paper and pencil assignment is painstaking. He neglects to bring back homework. Kulbir’s learning difficulties have been deemed great enough to warrant remedial help with a special education teacher. Both children have experienced a great deal of failure in the past. (JN, January 17)

This is not to say that play always guaranteed good behavior. There were infrequent
occasions, as the following extracts point out, when students misbehaved, acted inappropriately, and were admonished for their actions:

"Today I was helping Allen do his snowflake design. Kenneth sprayed the paint on the brush on me. When I sprayed it back to him, Mr. Silver caught me and I had to go to my desk and do something." (DN, Ronald, February 28)

"I was using the water table with Baldave and Edwin. They soaked me they splashed water on me with the balls. I'm going to beat Edwin up for splashing water on me. I hope [he] cries, 'Not!!!'" (DN, Kenneth, November 7)

"Today I was playing on the computer until Kenneth came and I got in trouble cause we were playing P.C. [Phrase Craze] and Carol started winning and I got mad cause Kenneth told the puzzle to her and then shut off the computer and Carol told Mr. Silver and I wasn't allowed to play on the computer I had to sit at my desk then Mr. Silver said I could do weaving silently." (DN, Renata, November 14)

As these children's reports attested, not all play sessions assured acceptable behavior from the students. Nevertheless, for the vast majority of time and students, play intervals usually meant periods in which children were well-behaved and, thus, they did not have to endure rebukes from me. In fact, as the following discussion suggests, the pupil-teacher relationship was enhanced through play.

iii) Play's Effects on the Pupil-Teacher Relationship

One aspect of the teacher-pupil relationship which sets it apart from the normal routine is that it is one time during the day when the teacher does not have to render judgments. Play is neither criticized nor praised nor is it marked right or wrong. As I pointed out in the discussion of children's behavior, I did not have to reprimand anyone to get down to work. In fact, teachers can partially abandon their customary
roles and enter the children’s world by becoming a partner in their play. By doing so, the child’s relationship with the teacher is strengthened. The following three extracts, two written by the students and one by me, suggest how this was brought about by play:

“So me, Mr. Silver and Peter played “Number in Order.” I won two games, Peter won one game and Mr. Silver didn’t win at all but I am shure he had fun. Poor Mr. Silver he didn’t win anything.” (DN, Janet, April 23)

“I ended up playing pick up sticks with Mr. Silver. Of course he won but it must have been beginner’s luck.” (DN, Jackie, April 30)

“Three girls used the water bottle for the first time. They asked me to guess how many small containers filled up a large. They asked me to drink some ‘beer’ which they made from Ivory Liquid and water.” (FN, April 30)

By engaging some children in their play, I was able to befriend the students in a way which the usual pupil-teacher relationship does not permit since so much of it is based on instruction and evaluation. During play, however, our association was more that of equals. The difference between the two situations was never made more apparent to me than when I played a game of Parcheesi with Mary, the Somalian child I previously characterized when I discussed the effects of play upon E.S.L. children. As my journal entry for that day indicates, I was able to experience aspects of Mary’s personality which I had not otherwise noticed in my usual role of her teacher:

(As we played) I had an opportunity to get close to her, to gain more insight into her capabilities and more than anything else, to gain her trust . . . By being in close proximity to me in this informal situation she spoke a little more loudly and a little more confidently. (JN, September 22)

At the same time that play facilitates a closer relationship between pupils and their teacher and provides the latter with insight into the character of his students, it also
furnishes an opportunity for the children to gain a different impression of their teacher. This, at least, seemed to be the opinion of one child who included the following in her play journal: “It kind of gives me a new view of you so that you’re not just like a teacher who stuffs work down your throat” (DN, Sally, November 22).

5. Play Gives Rise to Fantasies of Aggression

A large number of play episodes resulted in the construction of weapons which the children would then use in mock play. By conjuring up symbols of aggression, constructing them, and then using them in a playful way, children were allowing themselves an outlet for their emotions which they might not otherwise have expressed. The following passages illustrate the students’ utilization of the play periods to demonstrate that aggressiveness:

“On Thursday I went to junk with Carol. It was really the same because we made a bat again but it didn’t work so Carol and I just played sword and were hitting each other (we didn’t get hurt) with it.” (DN, Narinder, May 16)

“I was using the Lego. I made a tank. Vithuran made a jet. It was fun. We were playing World War One. Vithuran won. I was Loundon he was Canada. He was shooting rockets at me I was moving backwards and forwards he kept on missing me. When he came low I rammed the front of his plain then my arm fell off. That’s how he beat me.” (DN, Kenneth, April 30)

The fact that many of the boys used the play periods to express their aggressive fantasies was not surprising in view of recent research which concluded that “males are more attracted to aggressive interactions than females” (Craig & Pepler, 1995, p. 20). But what made the scenarios in which the children used their time to play with weapons so unique was the fact that some girls also used their play time to reveal their aggressive tendencies. Moreover, as the following report indicates, some of the
girls acknowledged that what they were doing was out of character with how they normally acted and with how they were usually perceived by others: “Today I did junk with two Wackos (Narinder and Donna). We decided that we would make a baseball bat. . . . Narinder and Donna were acting really crazy and I admit so was I” (DN, Sandeep, May 7). This report was, in fact, written by the one girl in the class who would likely be characterized as the most serious of all the students. To support these findings, Donna’s report of the same activity demonstrates the aggression that these girls showed: “Narinder hit two home runs. I hit two home runs too. But it was really for hitting people with” (DN, Donna, May 7). My own observations of girls’ participation during play (to be discussed in depth afterwards) reflect the fact that girls normally do not engage in play of an aggressive type. Nonetheless, play does furnish everyone, girls included, with the opportunity to “lose” themselves temporarily, step into another character and engage in a kind of act that they would not normally perform, yet one in which they feel the need to participate.

6. Social Aspects of Play

If one were to have entered the class during the middle of a play session, one would probably have heard a lot of chatter and seen children engaged with one another at an activity center, either playing together or simply sharing space beside one another. Upon closer observation, however, one would also have probably seen several students who were playing by themselves. As I once noted in my journal, “Everyone in the class was involved with somebody else except for Zelda, Helen, and Renata” (JN, November 8). Children, I have noticed, work alone for one of three reasons: 1) they enjoy the opportunity of playing independently; 2) they are unsure of how to gain entry into a group either because of social skill inadequacies or a lack of communication skills (primarily the case with E.S.L. children); and 3) some children
have been socially isolated by the others.

With respect to 1) above, some children embarked on an activity one day and became so intrigued with it that they continued to engage themselves with the same project from week to week. Thomas and Peter were two boys who began making their own robots and stayed with that activity for the entire year. In both the following entries the issue of ownership seemed to have been a concern to these children:

“Today I was at junk and I was working on my robot.” (DN, Thomas, December 15)

“I was working on my robot Super Prag and nobody helped me.” (DN, Peter, February 7)

In the last entry, Peter’s pride in working on something he felt he owned seemed to take precedence over any inclination he might have had to play with anyone else. One could speculate that Peter was fiercely proud of his independence and anxious about relinquishing his sense of ownership.

2) Some children did not have the requisite social skills to enter a group partly from shyness and/or a lack of English skills. Arthur, for instance, a shy Pakistani boy with minimal English, worked by himself and without distraction for the entire play session usually building or assembling a puzzle. Similarly Paul, newly arrived from another school and not yet in the class long enough to have established any friendships, simply constructed monsters from plasticine. In both cases the solitary play provided a “safety valve” for them before they began to make advances with respect to socializing with the other children. Eventually, one of these boys formed associations with his classmates which resulted in a great deal of associative and cooperative play. Unfortunately, Paul was never able to develop relationships with the other children which led to much social play. Yet, owing to the prowess which he demonstrated in his use of plasticine and the pleasure he derived from several other play activities,
(including participation in games with Janet and myself as mentioned previously) Paul was able to gain a degree of self-esteem from play activities even though he did not usually participate with others.

Finally, despite the strong socializing factor that play seemed to be, there were some children who played by themselves not out of choice but rather from necessity. Helen, for instance, was a girl who was excluded by the other children, in particular the girls who had established several small cliques among themselves. During the play periods, Helen invariably painted or did cut and paste activities by herself. But as her report of April 11 implies, she wanted very much to gain acceptance by the others: “Yesterday I was on beading. We made a jumping rope. It was fun. I couldn’t be it wen Donna was so nice to me. I think there are get alog weth me” ["Yesterday I was beading. We made a jumping rope. It was fun. I couldn’t believe it when Donna was so nice to me"] (DN, Helen). Here Helen expressed her surprise when Donna, a very sullen and haughty child on frequent occasions, allowed her to enter into the activity with her and her friends. Unfortunately for Helen, there seemed to be no carry-over from the play inside the classroom to the playground; Helen never seemed to play with the other girls in the class during recess.

On the other hand, another girl who was socially isolated at the beginning of the school year eventually gained acceptance from the other girls. Jennifer, who stood outside the classroom during the national anthem and who did not participate during celebrations such as Valentine’s Day and Hallowe’en for religious reasons, craved acceptance by the girls in the class who formed the “in” group. But for the first part of the term at least, Jennifer did not play with anyone while she was outside in the schoolyard. Little by little, however, she began to be accepted by the others, as the following journal extract of mine points out:

Jennifer and Susan did origami, an activity which was introduced to them by a
George Brown worker at the previous lunch. Interesting that they were working together; usually Jennifer is socially isolated. May have had something to do with the fact that Nancy and Donna (whom Susan usually befriends) were not here this afternoon. (JN, February 28)

By the end of the schoolyear Jennifer had been able to secure a place for herself in the group in which she wanted to be welcomed. This acceptance was evidenced in the school playground where, interestingly enough, she could be seen playing a card game entitled “Signal,” a game which some of the girls played during play periods within the classroom.

7. Play is a Learning Device

The original intent of this thesis was not to examine the ways in which play explicitly contributes to academic learning. Nevertheless, the reflections by the children themselves in addition to my own observations suggest that play has a pivotal role in learning even when it is not specifically planned. This learning seemed to arise through one of the following three processes: i) experimentation and discovery; ii) practice and reinforcement of previously taught concepts and techniques; and iii) following instructions.

i) Experimentation and Discovery

Several girls used the easel to experiment with colour. In one instance which I discussed under the theme of Success, Donna commented on how the scribble painting she made with Frances brought praise from her classmates. As my notes indicate, however, I was quite apprehensive about their activity:

One of the most interesting endeavours was done by Donna and Frances. They put on plastic gloves and splattered and rubbed paint on a piece of paper set up
on the easel. At first I thought they were making a total mess and I almost reprimanded them and had them stop. But I didn’t and I let them continue. They made three pieces which were attractive. They did what they called “scribble painting.” (JN, January 24)

Although Frances had the notion of “scribble painting” prior to entering the activity, the very nature of the exercise was experimental. Similarly, Sandeep also indicated a level of anxiety and hesitancy when she described her own form of “scribble painting”:

I went on Carol’s side [of the easel] and started mixing colours. When time was up I took my picture off the easel and folded it together because I wanted to see how it would look when I unfolded it. When I opened it up I saw a little butterfly in it, so instead of garbaging it, I kept it. (DN, Susan, February 3)

The following excerpt demonstrates how several girls learned about colour as they experimented with mixing colours at the water table:

Yesterday I did the water tub with Susan and Jackie (the wacko). First we filled the water tub with water. Then we put red and blue food colouring in the tub. The water turned purple because when you mix blue and red together you get purple. (DN, Carol, November 8)

For several periods during the course of the year I left out various science kits which are distributed by the North York Board of Education Science Department to help teach environmental studies. I thought that although the children in my class might have already explored the unit entitled Magnets, which is listed as part of the Grade 3-4 curriculum, they might enjoy the opportunity of using the kit again. Furthermore, I felt that simply having been exposed to a certain unit in a previous grade does not guarantee that all the learning about that subject had been exhausted. For that reason I decided to reorder the kit of materials and supplement it with a variety of books about magnets. The result was that many children opted to use the
magnet unit as their source of play and, by experimentation and use of prior knowledge, came to gain a greater understanding of the attributes of magnets. The following entries denote the learning which was reinforced by their play:

“today i did magnets i lerened that a comps repels a magnet.” (DN, George, February 3)

“I just found out that a horseshoe magnet can hold up 12 black magnets. When I put three magnets at the bottom of the table and five at the top when I flipped over the bottom magnet the top one flipped over too.” (DN, Cory, February 3)

“Today Me, A. and S. did magnet for activities. I larned that magnets can magnetize a nother magnet throuth a lot of things like: tubes, paper and placstee [plastic].” (DN, Sunny, February 3)

A journal entry of mine also suggests that several boys discovered some novel concepts related to the theme of electricity with the electrical apparatus (e.g. batteries, lightbulbs and wires) which I introduced to the students and with a small car that they had made from Lego:

At my suggestion they tried to make the lego car move with the motor, wires and hand-held generator. Lo and behold, they got it to move. Not only that, but by reversing the direction of their hand motion they were able to move the car in reverse. (JN, February 18)

Although my suggestion somewhat precludes the notion of unstructured play, it should be pointed out that the students had the option of following or not following up my recommendation. Moreover, what they chose to do afterwards (i.e. reversing the direction) was left entirely to their discretion.

ii) Learning from practice and reinforcement of previous techniques

One area which I thought would interest children and which would also permit
them to capitalize on what they had previously been taught was art. By providing them with materials, which at a previous time they had been asked to use in a particular way and for a particular purpose, children were able to practise their skills and gain mastery over the materials. As the following journal extract states, many children chose to employ techniques which had been taught to them by an itinerant art consultant:

Today for activities I did art with Lily and Donna. I did the technics that Mrs. Simpson taught us. At first I made a park. In my park there was a catipiller on top of flowers. I used sponge tapping, paint tapping and cardboard. On my other painting I made a butterfly. I used all sponge tapping for my butterfly. (DN, Renata, February 3)

Some children also used the blackboard to practise handwriting skills and to draw. One girl who was receiving remedial instruction used her own individual wordbook as a source for playing Hangman on the board with a student teacher.

Each of these cases indicates that play can be used to allow children to gain a greater understanding and familiarity with ideas, techniques, and vocabulary.

iii) Learning through play by following instructions

Children also used books to enhance their play. After we had attended a workshop at the local library on the use of string to create designs, I brought in several books by the workshop leader which the children used to practise what they had been taught and to learn new tricks. Similarly, several people used the book Play with Plasticine to provide them with inspiration and show them new techniques. Play’s contribution to learning via the use of instructional materials is made explicit by one girl who used a fellow student’s choice of a book to make a pair of “glasses”: “I did a [sic] activity called cut and paste. I made glasses out of pipe cleaners, construction
paper, glue and tape. Narinder was the one who provided the book. I was a learner like everyone else at our table” (DN, Susan, November 17). It should be noted that this kind of activity might not ordinarily be viewed as play since one does not usually associate following written instructions as a form of play. But what is important to remember here is the intent of the activity. Susan and Nancy were not required to do this activity and they could modify it in any way that they chose, even to the extent of not doing it if they did not want to.

8. Play Facilitates Cooperation
An observer would conclude that there is a high degree of cooperation amongst students as they play. Children may be collaborating on a combined project, playing a game in a friendly manner, or simply sharing space at a specific center. My own observations suggest all these aspects of cooperation but it is the children’s own accounts which really reflect the level of cooperation which took place during the periods allotted for play. For instance, the following excerpt from an interview with three children who had been using the water table demonstrates one manifestation of this cooperation, namely, sharing:

Janet: You get to learn to cooperate because at the water table you can’t have the whole table to yourself . . . you learn to mix colours . . . it’s fun.
Question: You mentioned cooperation. In what way did you cooperate?
Susan: We were sharing balls. We had a competition. (IN, June 20)

Another aspect of children’s cooperation which was brought about by the play sessions was “helping.” The children used this term themselves to describe what had occurred during their play activity. Moreover, the following three excerpts written by three boys who worked at the same activity provide illustrations that helping did in fact take place. In this sense it is one indication of validation through triangulation in the
collection of data:

"I was doing with Thomas the Super T. I helped Thomas build his robot and it was fun." (DN, Peter, November 29)

"Today I was at junk and I was making a robot. Peter helped me do the robot. I named the robot Super T." (DN, Thomas, November 29)

"Today I was doing junk. I was helping Thomas with his robot. I got lot of fun today. I helped Peter a littel that what I did today." (DN, Baldave, November 29)

Various other accounts also suggest that a major component of children's cooperation was done by assisting one another:

"Today I was working at art and crafts. I was helping my friend Janet." (DN, Susan, April 24)

"Today I was at junk. First I helped Allen with his c.n. tower then I started on my robot." (DN, Thomas, April 24)

"I helped Sundip and Ronald at the sand table. I made a brigce [bridge] for them out of popsicles." (DN, Edwin, April 24)

In each of the preceding passages the students actually name the element of cooperation, namely helping, which was present in their play. Not so explicit is the notion of collaboration which is inferred from the accounts of two boys who had played together:

"Today me and Daniel made a starship out of junk we made the soasor secshion [the saucer section] from two plates and the star drive from a pleage bottle . . . I worked on the sasor section and Daniel on the star drive . . . we named it the U.S.S. Exselsor." (DN, Isaac, April 3)

"Today I don junk with Issac. I found a plastic pleg box for our ship cald the ecsellsyer ship. We yoused the paper plat for the sauser section. . . we yoused the paper for the warp engines . . . I. designed it with windows." (DN, Daniel,
April 3)

In both these accounts the participants used the collective terms “we” and “our”, thus indicating joint ownership. Both boys had specific jobs with respect to the design and construction of their spaceship, thereby signifying the element of collaboration which went into this play episode.

The language of the children in the following documentary note (“Today I did lego with Daniel. We co-operated and we made a zoo together” [DN, Edwin, May 7]) and subsequent fieldnote also reveal an element of collaboration:

Kenneth: O.K., go and get it [the water] then. [Kenneth made a mountain with a hole in it.]

Kenneth: Let’s make mud.

George: Let’s punch this down. (George took sand and patted it down next to Kenneth who fetched a can of water.)

Kenneth: Mix it all up. (They both pushed the sand to one side of the box, then heaped it in the middle. George shaped rows perpendicular to the sand in the middle.)

Kenneth: Let’s make it like this. (FN, February 2)

The words “together” and “let’s” respectively in these two examples signify the level of collaboration which took place during the play.

Another aspect of children’s cooperation, as suggested by the following passages, was taking turns:

“Yesterday I was playing Jenga with Edwin and Baldave and Kenneth. First Edwin went then Kenneth went after a little while it was my turn and then I made the whole thing fall.” (DN, Sundip, June 20)

“I played on the computer with Jennifer and it was fun. First I went to Kids Pix and Jennifer printed a picture. After Jennifer was finished printing out her
picture I made a picture.” (DN, Sandeep, April 30)

“Today I was using the computer. I liked using it; it was a success. I was working with Kenneth. I liked working with him; he was a great partner. We both played wheel of fortune.” (DN, Ernest, November 17)

Taking turns is a social grace which requires understanding, patience, and the ability to tolerate non-immediate gratification. The failure to take turns can lead to disputes both inside and outside the classroom. The preceding instances suggest that play episodes provided opportunities for children to learn to acquire this vital social skill.

Although cooperation is present much more often than not, nevertheless, there were instances when it was lacking. For example, my own journal entry describing an attempt on the part of a number of girls to organize a dramatic skit demonstrates that cooperation did not always take place:

The tape shows that they had lots of difficulty getting started, lots of “sh’s” and reprimands from participants to do this or stop that. . . . They just couldn’t discipline themselves enough to stay “in role.” They would drift in and out and those who were “out” at any particular moment would interfere with those who were “in.” (JN, March 24)

This observation led me to conclude that one impediment to cooperation taking place amongst the children was the number of people who were participating at any one activity at any one time. In the instance just cited, as many as ten girls were attempting to put on the skit. Upon discussion with the entire class, limits to the number of participants at a particular activity (decided upon by the children in collaboration with me) were imposed. Not all play episodes resulted in harmony. As the next example points out, some children will at times become engaged in disputes:

Yesterday I worked on the computer [computer] it was fun until when I was about to win Susan told Carol the word and I got mad so I left and told them that they
were chiting. After I went to the string and beads and helped them untie the
strings because someone tied them together. (DN, Jackie, April 30)

In this case the dispute was not resolved nor did it escalate since the offended party
simply left and seemingly worked out her anger or forgot about it at another activity.
The following example also demonstrates another instance when cooperation did not
take place during play: “After we played [at the water table] we wanted to dump the
water. It was hard because Donna just sat there and didn’t help. But we sat down and
we told her she had to help at least a bit” (DN, Nancy, June 20).

From the examples given it would seem that play engenders various forms of
cooperation in the form of turn-taking, sharing, collaboration, and helping. Yet despite
the high degree of cooperation which was present during the play, some children
would, on occasion, become embroiled in bickering. It should be noted, however, that
even with all the squabbles which occurred as the ten girls attempted to put on the skit,
they did persevere until they had completed their drama without one participant
dropping out. In the last two instances illustrating this negative case analysis, one girl
worked out her anger through another activity while others resolved their differences
through talking and diplomacy.

9. Play Facilitates Creativity, Imagination and the Expression of Fantasies

“I like activities because it is fun to create stuff” was one child’s response to why
he liked the play sessions. Creativity was witnessed in many forms: one child used
junk materials to make an adjustable “hockey stick” (“The hockey stick you can turn it
to any size that you want” [DN, Edwin, December 15]); another employed arts and
crafts supplies to construct a basket (“I made a basket out of a strawberry basket,
tissue paper and paper cleaners. Then I made a rose out of tissue paper and stuck a
little piece of pipe cleaner at the bottom to make it look like a stem” [DN, Frances,
March 24)); three pupils combined the sand center and Lego to create a town which was intersected by a river that flooded and needed to be dammed. Children drew upon their imagination and experience with the properties of materials to cut, fold, mould, build, and scrunch. They constructed puppets from bags and newspaper, guns from empty plastic bottles, robots from plastic tennis ball tubes, and castles from sand and water. Their creations were limited only by their imaginations and by the availability of materials, time, and space.

Yet children used the play sessions to be creative in other ways as well. One of the most popular of the activities was drama, a center which could be used with puppets or without. (In fact most of the children who chose to do drama did not use puppets. Instead they opted to enter the skits as themselves with or without props.) Some of the scenarios which were played out have already been mentioned (for example, a supply teacher faced with a host of badly behaved children). Other themes which students dramatized suggested that children used the play sessions as a way of assimilating scenes from "real life" which they hear about or see on television and in movies but which they are not fully able or ready to comprehend. Narinder's account of what she did for play illustrates this conclusion: "Today I did puppets with Janet, Donna and the play was about a little girl and she killed this boy's mom and grandpa and at the end the little boy killed the little girl" (DN, Narinder, November 7). The theme of death was common with the children whether they chose to dramatize it or to depict it using another medium. The following citation demonstrated how one boy explored his understanding of life and death through painting:

Painting was good my painting is call blood valley. One side is life the other death hoever [whoever] past the life side will live forever. And hoever past the death side will be killed and will never be seen oghen [again]. (DN, Sunny, April 3)
The notion of death was also explored by Mehendan and Sundip who used Lego to make a jail cell with a secret door and execution chamber. Edwin wrote the following about his play:

We made a play called Death Valley. We made things like monsters and guns. . . . There are going to be ten levels. Each level has a boss at the end and when Kulbir passes a level he gets pulled to the next level. I am the bad guy and Kulbir is the good guy" (DN, January 24).

When I interviewed the two boys who played out this skit they provided several thoughtful reasons for why they liked to do drama. “In drama you should have something that you want to tell people. It’s like a secret code that you want to tell people and you’re not telling them, you’re telling them in action and real life” (IN, January 24). Somewhat esoterically, his partner seemed to share the same point of view when he said, “I like to do drama because we can make an old movie into a different movie” (IN, January 24). Both boys conveyed the impression that their dramatic play encompassed two separate worlds, one which was real and one which was not. By playing out this grim theme they did not have to dread it. Gruesome, horrid themes were further explored by these two boys when they constructed figures using lego: “We made a crash plane. . . . the person inside the plane dies because when he was so high in the sky the gas was empty” (DN, Edwin, February 28).

Other themes which the children dramatized (such as the “killer baby-sitter”) all brought the reality of the subject closer to the children. But because it was done in a safe, playful environment, namely the classroom where the children were surrounded by others, they did not have to feel threatened by the horror which these dramatic scenarios and macabre constructions depicted.
10. Playing is fun and therefore it helps bring about a positive attitude towards school

"The puzzle I was doing was a new one and I had a lot of fun." (DN, Frances, April 3)

"Today at activities I had a lot of fun." (DN, Ronald, November 22)

"The activity I did was great. I had fun doing it." (DN, Vithuran, February 22)

These three quotations typified the most common response in the students’ play journal entries. But what it was exactly that made the play activities fun for the children was not often clarified. Analysis of the data has led me to conclude that children derived fun from their play for one of the following three reasons: 1) they gained satisfaction from making something; 2) during play they decided for themselves what they wanted to do and with whom they wanted to play; and 3) play acted as a break from the normal routine.

With respect to 1) above, children enjoyed making things because it enabled them to explore ("Today Narinder and I painted. I discovered baby blue and a light green. . . It was really fun" [DN, Sandeep, January 24]) and to discover ("I was just mixing colours and then I would write something down and it would come out different colours . . . it was fun" [DN, Frances, April 12]). Others either enjoyed the creative aspect ("I thought junk was fun because I made a Christmas tree out of creapit paper and buttons and toilet rolls . . . it was really fun" [DN, Renata, November 17]) or the fact that it allowed them to exercise their imagination ("I used pipe cleaners, cotton balls, paper bag, google eyes, tie, glue and my imagination" [DN, Jackie, November 29]). Still others were happy to complete a product ("The activities I did today was great. I got to do a activity and get to bring it home" [DN, Ronald, February 28]; "I like junk a lot it was fun to make a boat" [DN, Kulbir, May 7]) or recover from a previous setback ("On Wednesday Narinder, Donna and I went to the sandbox it was fun because the last time I worked with the sand we flooded the sink. This time we didn’t all we did was we
made a castle" [DN, Susan, April 30]).

The boys and girls seemed to be very much attracted to the idea that during play sessions they were able to choose where they wanted to go ("I like the idea of you can pick what center you want to go to" [IN, May 31]) and whatever they chose ("The thing I like about beads is that you can make anything at all that you want like bracelets and necklaces" [DN, Jennifer, May 7]). As important as doing what they wanted was, the boys and girls were even more emphatic that they equated fun with being able to do their play activity with whomever they chose ("The reason I like play activities is because you get to choose were you want to play and with who" [IN, May 31]). A great many of the boys and girls talked about how much fun they had because they were able to play with a friend ("I had a great time painting because I was painting with my best friend Zelda" [DN, Frances, April 12] and "The best of that activity was working with a friend" [DN, Ronald, April 12]). Even those children who seemed not to have any friends in the class relished the opportunity of playing with or beside others ("I thought that the activity I did was great the people who were there were Jackie, Jennifer and Narinder they were all nice to me" [DN, Helen, April 30]). As I previously stated in my discussion of the social aspects of play, almost all of the children were engaged with someone else during play activities. Such was not the usual state of affairs during the rest of the school day. Although children's desks were grouped, the students did not necessarily seat themselves with their friends (three times during the course of the year children changed their seating arrangement by drawing their group members' names randomly from a class list). Furthermore, most of the work that they had to do during the regular course of the day such as spelling, writing, and reading was done independently. When group work was required, I usually selected group members according to gender and academic ability. Therefore, play periods were virtually the only time when children were allowed to participate with classmates of their own
choosing. Judging from the numbers of associations that the children made between fun and working with friends, one of the great attractions of the play sessions was that they could play with their friends with whom they would presumably converse and cooperate. One child even acknowledged that even when they did not get along "it was fun to disagree" (IN, May 31).

When asked specifically for the reasons why they liked or did not like play (no responses indicating they did not like play activities were given), the overwhelming opinion of the children was that play was different from the normal course of events. The following opinions extracted from my interview notes illustrates this viewpoint:

"You would expect in grade 5 to have work, work, work."

"It takes your mind off work and you can just do whatever you want."

"After your work you can play and enjoy yourself."

"It’s okay to be playing once in a while. You don’t always have to be working all the time." (IN, May 31)

Judging from the way they felt, one could almost interpret the play period as a form of catharsis since it enabled the children to relieve themselves from the constant demands of the regular school day. Play, it would seem, gave them an opportunity to have a respite from the usual, rigorous requirements such as paper and pencil tasks, silence, sitting, and listening. At the same time it provided them with a sense of fun which one boy maintained you needed or "you’ll be a school dropout... [with play] you’ll want to stay in school more" (IN, June 20).

11. The Influence of Gender on Play

My own observations of the children's play led me to believe that boys and girls rarely mixed as they pursued their activities. ("Sandeep and Kenneth began at computers. They were joined by Edwin, Ernest, Mahendan and Carol who watched."

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This was the only activity where boys and girls mixed [JN, November 22]). My conclusion was confirmed by my associate teacher who wrote that "for the majority of the time the girls and boys play separately. The only time that they are a mixed group is during art" (FN, November 17). Moreover, girls seemed to gravitate toward certain activities while boys were attracted to others. For instance, the female students opted for painting, arts and crafts, and drama while the males tended to drift toward the building materials, plasticine, and games. Some activities such as sand and water attracted members of both sexes. Although there were exceptions to this division, the choice of activities did seem to break down according to some sort of gender influence. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy here is that the play: 1) enabled individual children to become engaged in an activity which was not in keeping with the stereotype of males and females; and 2) facilitated interaction between the two sexes, a state of affairs which is not usually witnessed in school.

As I have mentioned, very few boys chose drama for their play episodes. In fact, my observations and the entries of the students indicate that only two boys in the entire class chose to do drama for the entire year. By the same token, girls rarely chose to use lego and other building materials. Nevertheless, the fact that there was some crossover signifies the value of the play in that it allowed children to step out of character and negate the stereotype. Such was the case with Diana, who stated, "My favourite activity is building. I really like working with my friends and building a zoo" (DN, Diana, February 7). The participation in drama by two boys also breaks down the stereotype that one might expect of males and their non-involvement in dramatic play.

In discussing play's contribution to the interaction between the sexes, it should be pointed out that one would not ordinarily see much, if any, contact between girls and boys. Certainly one sees little evidence of it in the playground and one would predict, given the prepubescent, self-conscious stage of these children, that there
would be little voluntary contact established within the classroom. (Indeed, if one witnessed the embarrassment and uncontrollable giggling that takes place in the spring when puberty is taught coeducationally, one might think that males and females would never mix.) What the play seemed to do, however, was to facilitate interaction between boys and girls in both a cooperative and associative manner.

The following account demonstrates how boys and girls played together cooperatively:

Today I [Jennifer] did drama with Arthur and Daniel. The play was something like Three Ninja's Kickback. Me and Arthur were the ninjas and Daniel was all the monsters. In the beginning of the play Arthur would be fighting Daniel and Arthur gets beat up by Daniel and then Daniel runs away and Arthur sees me reading a book and he comes up to me and asked me if I know keratie and I say "yes" and then he asked me if I could teach him. I told him if he would let me fight I will teach him. (DN, Janet, March 24)

In this scenario we not only see evidence of boys playing in an unlikely activity for the majority of the boys in the class but we also witness a demonstration of cooperative play involving boys and girls. Furthermore, this extract reveals a girl who not only is unwilling to portray the stereotype of the defenceless female, but who also defies the usual characterization by adopting a rather bellicose stance.

In the following extract of a male student, we also see an instance of cooperative play between boys and girls: "Today I was using the water table. I was working with Zelda and Frances" (DN, Kenneth, April 30). The confirming entry of one of the girls who took part in this activity also lends credibility that there was cooperation between the sexes: "Today I did water. I worked with Frances and Kenneth. I really enjoyed it, especially the water fight and our Lime-Aid Factory" (DN, Zelda, April 30).

Although these excerpts illustrate cooperative play between boys and girls,
most of the play between them was of an associative nature in that the children played beside one another, sharing proximal space and materials but primarily being concerned with themselves.

"Today I did painting with Ronald." (DN, Susan, April 30)
"Today I was working with Allen, Jackie, and Edwin. I was making a new body for my doll." (DN, Hedieh, November 29)
"Today I worked at the beads with Susan and Carol. I made a friendship bracelet." (DN, Edwin, April 29)

In all three episodes described, boys played with girls or rather beside them for they were each involved in their own activity. (Notice the pronoun "I" which is used in each entry as compared to the use of "we" to describe the cooperative play.)

The following three entries indicate the one other instance where boys and girls came together during play episodes, namely for games:

"Yesterday I played two games of Jenga with Sundip, Kenneth, and Baldave [all boys]." (DN, Jackie, June 20)
"Janet and Ronald played Connect Four together." (FN, November 22)
"The same people are playing Monopoly - Amy, Arthur, George, and Renata." (FN, January 17)

It should be pointed out that in the latter two cases, each of the two girls who played with the boys was isolated from the other girls in the class. Of the other girls who were observed playing with boys, they were confident, secure children who seemed comfortable playing with either boys or girls. The same might be said of the one boy in the class who played with girls on more than one occasion. One could infer from these observations that children overwhelmingly tended to play with others of their own gender. When interaction did take place it was either because children did not feel welcomed by members of their own sex or they were secure enough that they could
feel comfortable with members of the opposite gender.

12. **Play Enables Children to Deal with Frustration and Disappointment in a Positive Manner**

In many cases the play for some children turned out to be either very difficult ("Jenga is really fun. But it's really hard because the pieces on top of them are falling" [DN, Kenneth, June 20]) or exceedingly frustrating ("I was starting all over because my robot fell and it broke into pieces" [DN, Peter, April 3]). Yet despite the odd moment of exasperation, the students seemed to deal with their frustration in a constructive, mature manner. This approach was made possible in part, I believe, because the play did not compel a right or wrong response. As one child remarked, "If you make a mistake you don't have to worry about it because you can just do it over again easily . . . We really don't have to worry about it being performed or anything" (IN, April 30).

In dealing with the frustration which occasionally accompanied episodes of play, the students seemed to adopt a variety of strategies. First and foremost, they would simply attempt to try it again ("I was trying to make a house. I finished it but after it broke. Then I tried to make it again. I made it and after it was perfect" [DN, Sundip, November 7]). Some children declined to evaluate their play and thus, for them, the play was rarely frustrating ("When you make something, it doesn't really break. If it is bad or something you just put it back" [IN, May 31]). Some children, when faced with a difficulty, would simply redo their activity until it was successful ("I forgot to put a knot at one end of the string and all the beads kept on falling off the string till I put a knot on the end of the string" [DN, Susan, November 29]).

Sometimes children adopted a different strategy; after experiencing frustration they would modify their activity until it proved successful to them. This approach was used by three girls who decided to make a volcano at the sand center: "Carol, Hedieh,
and I got water in the sandbox. Everything we made got ruined and everything was a mess. We decided to make the volcano into a well" (DN, Susan, April 30). In a similar manner, two girls who were constructing a robot from junk materials could not get the glue to hold so they altered their approach by using masking tape and painting over it (FN, May 17).

In those cases where repetition and modification did not prove satisfactory, some children simply put off the activity until another time. The following excerpts demonstrate how several students decided to defer the play until later in order to diminish their disappointment and distance themselves from their frustration:

"I tried to make a model airplane of the first airplane. You could say it half-worked and it half-failed. It kept on breaking. I may try another time." (DN, Sunny, April 12)

"I started making my bracelet, but it didn't turn out nice because the string was too long. So I had to cut it. I started making the bracelet again but it didn't work. So I put the string in my pocket so I could do it at home." (DN, Narinder, November 29)

When the frustration became too great some children simply chose to do something else. "At first I was going to make a puppet but it didn't work out after I tried it 4 times so I made a box out of popsicle sticks" (DN, Jackie, November 29).

In the vast majority of cases in which things did not work out exactly as planned, children did not allow themselves to become frustrated. One girl's entry provides us with insight into the reasons why she was not deflated by her play activity: "Today I was painting... I painted another cloud with light purple. I didn't like it so I threw it in the garbage and painted a different picture. I didn't finish it but I will another day" (DN, Jennifer, March 24). In this instance Jennifer was able to minimize her disappointment and frustration by discarding her first picture. If she felt that her first picture was a
reflection of her value as an artist, she was quickly able to dispel any such notion by painting another picture which was more to her liking. Thus, one could infer that although play may initially lead to a sense of frustration, it also enables a child to recover any loss of self-esteem which may result by allowing the child to pursue further play.

In somewhat the same way as play helps one rebound from frustration or disappointment, it also allows children the opportunity to recover from a losing experience. In both of the following instances children commented about how they lost to others while engaging in play adventures:

"Yesterday I worked on the computer. I worked with Susan. . . . I had not played this game before so I was not good at it." (DN, Jennifer, March 7)

"Today I used the computer with Edwin and Sundip. We played Wheel of Fortune. Edwin won." (DN, Kenneth, February 22)

While one might normally expect these two children to be somewhat disappointed, they both concluded their entries with the statement "I had fun." The reason why they did not experience the common feelings of failure or letdown which often accompany losing was provided by another student who wrote, "We both did a great job because there is no competition." Herein lies one of the great contributions of play; by furnishing students with the opportunity to have fun, play also defines itself as a medium in which the need to be right or the best or the brightest is supplanted by a desire to be happy with oneself. For a brief time the children can be satisfied with themselves for who they are and not for what they may achieve.

Despite the overwhelming number of cases which indicated that play enabled the students to cope with frustration, disappointment and losing, there were a few instances when children could not tolerate any of the three. The following entry describes the negative reaction of two girls who lost at a game during play: "Today
Carol, Edwin, and me started playing pickup sticks. . . . Carol quit when she started to lose and I got upset that Edwin was winning so I also quit” (DN, Susan, February 28). Interestingly enough, neither the author of this entry nor her friend who quit, was ordinarily a person who experienced much frustration. Further testimony to the frustration which can sometimes result from play is given by the following two boys who stated:

“Today I was at junk and [I] didn’t add new things to it because I was starting all over because my robot fell and it broke into pieces. So I don’t have anything to write.” (DN, Thomas, April 3)

“I made a mess with the junk and I had to clean it up. That why I have a head ache right now.” (DN, Ronald, November 29)

Although these last two entries do suggest that play can induce frustration, it should also be pointed out that the boy whose robot broke into pieces continued to pursue this activity each week for the entire year. Moreover, the author of this second citation prefaced almost every single account of his play episodes with a positive statement such as “Play activities are great” and “I love to do play activities.”

13. Play Enables Children to Make Things for Others

Play allowed children the opportunity to build, create, and make something for someone whom they cherished or whose favour they sought. Judging from the responses about their play, children chose to make something for somebody for one of three reasons: 1) for the sake of reparation; 2) to seek approval; 3) simply from their generosity of spirit.

Reparation, in the psychoanalytic sense, is the reduction of guilt by the doing of good works. Young children often make gifts for their parents without realizing that
what they are actually doing is attempting to assuage their unconscious guilt for hateful feelings they may harbour. Older children, however, may be astute enough to understand that they are in fact trying to make amends for something they did or, as the following passage points out, something they did not do: “They helped me make a Valentine’s Day card for my uncle because I never got him anything for his birthday” (DN, Jackie, February 28).

In other cases children make things with the intention of gaining approval from adults. The following notation demonstrates how one girl sought recognition from the vice-principal through her play: “Today I make a bunny and I put a dress on it and gave it to Mrs. Jackson. She said it was nice and she hung it up in her office” (DN, Renata, April 3).

More frequently, children often make something which they hope will curry favour with their parents. Whether their motivation is reparative or approval-seeking in such statements as “I made my mom something that I think she will like” is not really the issue; what is important to recognize here is that children use their play to gain the approbation which they feel will endear them to the adult in question.

Thirdly, children may use their play simply as a sign of their generosity by donating a gift to a friend, sibling or relative. Here again the underlying motivation may be reparative (perhaps to redress a wrong that one sister may have done to another) or approval-seeking. However, as the following excerpt indicates, it may also arise from a genuine unselfishness and sense of goodness: “I love doing cut and paste the best because it was fun to do something for a friend” (DN, Diana, November 17).

In this chapter I have discussed the predominant themes which arose from the analysis of the data. In Chapter Five I will contextualize my findings by looking at the themes from a holistic point of view.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF THE THEMES

Emerson's view that what we are, we shall teach, is fundamental to holistic education. (Miller, 1996, p. 3)

In this chapter I will be examining the themes of Chapter Four from a holistic perspective for reasons I discussed under Review of the Literature. To recapitulate briefly, I chose a holistic framework to analyze the themes because I feel that it is the only approach to education which can adequately account for the inclusion of play within the elementary child's curriculum. No other philosophy of education embraces the idea of play. A transmission view of education simply looks at education from a stimulus-response position in which children are rewarded for achieving certain outcomes and demonstrating competency on batteries of standardized tests. The behavioral form of psychology which governs transmission "ignores the inner life of the person and is only concerned with environment and behavior" (Miller, 1993, p. 35).

Although the transaction approach to education is more conducive to the inclusion of play in schools it is still too narrow in its scope to be used as a structure for analyzing the themes of the previous chapter. The transaction curriculum, which uses cognitive psychology as its rationale, focuses on cognition and intelligence. It is primarily concerned with the mathematical-logical intelligence which Gardner and Hatch (1984) hypothesize as one of the seven forms of intelligence. As such, the transactional curriculum is not able to account for much of the emotional and social behavior which can be observed while children are absorbed in their play.

The only approach which can do justice to a discussion of children's play is one
in which attention is given to the whole child. For this reason I have decided to adopt a holistic framework for investigating the themes which arose from the data on children's play.

Holistic education is concerned with establishing a number of connections which contribute to the emergence of the "whole person." In order to examine the influence of play upon the whole child, I have linked the themes from Chapter Four to these connections. It should be noted before proceeding that some of the themes may be related to more than one connection and, hence, some overlapping will occur. Secondly, as the following analysis will show, play can quite easily be discussed within a holistic context. Nevertheless, there are some connections in which the play data do not readily fit. With this in mind, the following outline places the themes (which are numbered according to the discussion in Chapter Four) within a holistic connection:

Self and Community
The influence of play upon E.S.L. children (1)
Play enables low-achieving children to help others (2)
The effects of play on classroom climate (4)
Play engenders a positive attitude towards school (10)

Self and Self
The influence of play upon E.S.L. children (1)
Play enables low-achieving children to help others (2)
Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success, and self-esteem (3)
**Linear Thinking and Intuition**

Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success, and self-esteem (3)

Play is a learning device (7)

Play facilitates creativity, imagination, and the expression of fantasies (9)

**Body and Mind**

The effects of play on classroom climate (4)

Play gives rise to fantasies of aggression (5)

Play facilitates creativity, imagination, and the expression of fantasies (9)

The influence of gender on play (11)

Play enables children to deal with frustration and disappointment in a positive manner (12)

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**The Relationship of the Themes to Holistic Education**

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One of the major tenets of holistic education is that teachers need to be “congruent” with their students. Essentially, the teacher must develop a genuineness with his students if the latter are to accept him and adopt a positive attitude towards
school. As Rogers has said, "Teachers should simply learn to be with students. In being with students, I am fully present. I am not thinking about what I will be doing after school, but I engage each student directly" (as cited in Miller, 1996, p. 179). Such was the case when I participated with several children during their play. As I pretended to drink the "beer" which several girls had concocted from Ivory Liquid and water, and as I proceeded to lose several games of "Number in Order," I was "learning to be with students" (Miller, 1996, p. 179) in the manner which Rogers suggests. Moreover, as I played Parcheesi with Mary, the girl from Somalia, I was able to glimpse new insights into her character. I was not concerned with evaluation or instruction and so I was simply able to focus on her and our play. By doing so, I was able to gain her trust. Thus, she emerged from her shell by "speaking a little more loudly and a little more confidently" (JN, January 24). For the first time I was able to establish a relationship with Mary which could lead to trust in the classroom and to school in general since, for a short time at least, I was able to be my true self and, consequently, so was she. I was not concerned with any concepts or skills that I felt Mary needed to learn. Since my only interest was in playing with Mary, I was able to enter the activity with an "uncluttered mind" (Miller, 1993, p. 39). Unless teachers are able to convey this genuineness, so we are advised, we will never be able to build an environment of trust since students feel alienated by a teacher who is too preoccupied to "connect" to his pupils.

Authenticity was also fostered through the play since it freed me from many concerns over behavior. As I stated under the heading of management in my discussion of theme number four:

Far too often I am too concerned with the fact that children are not doing what I want them to do whether it be their writing or their sketching or another assignment. The nicest thing about the time given over to play is that I am rarely
perturbed by their behavior.

Play afforded me an opportunity to forget about my usual preoccupations with discipline and allowed me to be more natural with the students.

Similarly, for the duration of the play period, I did not have to be concerned with whether children were completing their assignments. In the cases of Allen, who was playing with plasticine, and both Kulbir and Cory, who were at the sandbox, the issue of unfinished assignments was a never-ending source of consternation. I was constantly reminding them to attend to their task and, in doing so, I only aroused their hostility and my own impatience. The play, however, enabled us to gain a respite from each other. It provided them with an opportunity to be themselves without the fear of criticism or rebuke. It also allowed them to see me in a role which was accepting and trusting. For a brief period of time I could be “real” or “authentic.” By adopting play in the classroom I was able to forget about my usual concerns over behavior, completion of work and noise level; instead, I could simply be “mindful” of my students who now saw me in a different, more favourable light. As one child said, “It kind of gives me a new view of you so that you’re not just like a teacher who stuffs work down your throat.” By providing an opportunity to play I was able to engender a climate in which both children and teacher could be “mindful” of themselves and each other. In learning what the other was “really” like, a sense of mutual trust and fondness was fostered.

A sense of community in the classroom was also facilitated when children were allowed to choose where it was they wanted to go (“I like the idea of you can pick what center you want to go to”), what they wanted to do (“The thing I like about beads is that you can make anything at all that you want like bracelets and necklaces”), and with whom they wanted to play (“The reason I like play activities is because you get to choose were you want to play and with who”). By providing children with the opportunity of playing with others and, in particularly, others of their own choosing, I
helped establish a sense of community in the same way as Miller suggests it is advanced through the use of learning teams during cooperative education (1996, p. 138).

As it addresses the connection between self and community, holistic education seems to have little to say about interpersonal relations. Nevertheless, how a child interacts with others is an essential ingredient of social development and deserves mention. Miller, himself, summarizes the concerns of a holistic school: "We care about how students relate to others and to the community at large" (1996, p. 183).

The research data indicated numerous examples of the ways in which play engendered communication, cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, helping, collaboration, and friendship. An emphatic example concerns cooperation among E.S.L. children. One child noted that he played Wheel of Fortune on the computer “with my friend named Mehandan” even though both these children, who spoke Pashtu and Aramaic respectively, had only recently arrived in Canada and knew very little English. Nevertheless, by participating in play, they were able to communicate and form a friendship. Similar examples took place between E.S.L. children (Mary and Kate as they played “31” on the blackboard and a video game on the computer) and between low- and high-achieving children as illustrated in theme number two. There Thomas, a high achiever, comments how his friend Baldave, a low achiever, helped him build his robot (“Today I was at junk and Baldave was helping on my robot. Now the robot have firepower... It was Baldave’s idea to make the firepower”). Further indications that children learned to help one another through play are cited under theme number eight entitled “Play Facilitates Cooperation”:

“I helped Thomas build his robot.”

“Peter helped me do the robot.”

“Today I was working at art and crafts. I was helping my friend Jackie.”
“Today I was at junk. First I helped Arthur with his c.n. tower then I started on my robot.”

Children also attest to sharing (“You get to learn to cooperate because at the water table you can’t have the whole table to yourself” and “We were sharing balls”). The data also indicated numerous instances when children cooperated by taking turns (“Yesterday I was playing Jenga with Edwin and Baldave and Kenneth. First Edwin went then Kenneth went after a little while it was my turn and then I made the whole thing fall”).

An important component of interpersonal relations was also discussed under theme number eleven which described the ways boys and girls played together. There I noted that, but for the opportunity to play in the classroom, boys and girls rarely associated with one another. During play episodes, however, some boys and girls would do a skit together (“Today I [Janet] did drama with Arthur and Daniel); use the water table (Today I [a male student] was using the water table. I was working with Zelda and Frances); or engage in games (“Yesterday I [a girl] played two games of Jenga with Sundip, Kenneth, and Baldave).

Through helping, sharing, taking turns, and general cooperation the students learned to appreciate one another. Even in the occasional instance when cooperation did not take place (“It was even fun to disagree”), children were able to take advantage of the play opportunities “to work with and be with other people” (Miller, 1993, p. 37). In doing so they learned to “see the world from the other person’s point of view” (Miller, p. 37). In this way children began to make connections with one another.
Holistic Concept | Related Themes
---|---
Self-connections | Play's impact on E.S.L. children (1)
| Play's impact on low-achieving children (2)
| Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success and self-esteem (3)

In a holistic curriculum, "Children need to develop both a healthy ego and Self. "A healthy ego," Miller maintains, "arises from developing a sense of competence" (1996, p. 121). The play in this research study did not appear to contribute to the spiritual development of the Self but it certainly had a number of ramifications with respect to ego growth. Miller states that the sense of competence which is required for a child's ego can come from various skills such as reading, writing, and problem solving (1996, p. 121). I would also contend that ego development can be accomplished through other channels as well, including the mastery of non-academic achievements accomplished through play. For instance, in discussing the impact of play upon E.S.L. children, I referred to the example of Yusuf who was able to acquire a sense of independence and competence from looking at a book describing string tricks and practising these tricks on his own. Paul, the boy who was so adept at creating figures from plasticine, also derived similar benefits which furthered ego development. Finally, Arthur, the boy from Pakistan who spoke only a minimal amount of English, spent time by himself assembling puzzles without anyone's assistance.

A healthy dose of confidence was also generated for E.S.L. and low-achieving children through play. Themes one and two cite several instances where these
paint a picture; Mary spoke in a normal tone as she played a game with a friend; and Helen taught a high-achieving classmate how to play Billiard Parlour on the computer.

Play also contributed to the development of a healthy ego insofar as it ensured that each child would be successful at whatever he or she did. Both Yusuf, the boy from Ethiopia who enjoyed string tricks, and Arthur, the boy who assembled puzzles, "would express their satisfaction with their accomplishments by showing me what they had done and smiling at my acknowledgement." Some children expressed a sense of satisfaction from engaging in their play (Today I made a puppet. I did not fanac [finish] it. But I wated [wanted] to tell you about it. . . . it is looking nice") while others implicitly expressed their pleasure by acknowledging how happy they felt when others complimented them for what they had done during their play ("Today I went to paint with Frances. We make a scribble painting. . . . It was really fun. We made a big mess but we clean it up after. Everybody was asking how we made it, and that is very nice").

Success through play was made evident in many instances and on many occasions, but nowhere did it have more impact than in the case of Allen. As previously mentioned under theme number three, Allen had difficulty attaining feelings of success in all of the academic areas due, in part, to his distractability and lack of skills. Yet, as the following observations would suggest, Allen's self-esteem was substantially enhanced because of the success the play episodes afforded him:

"I usde the computers today and I made a pect weath all of the little stape fegrse on the computer and I pate a trane on me peer I rele tink it is grate" ["I used the computers today and I made a picture with all of the little (unintelligible) . . . I really think it is great"].

"I was playing with playdowe and I hads masde a airplane out of the playdowe it took me alotof time to do that it trunde it looked rely good" ["I was playing with playdough and I had made an airplane out of the playdough. It took me a lot of
time to do that. It turned out to look really good].

"Today I made my skyscraper that I didn't finish yet. I didn't finish it today and today it is already tall and I like it a lot".[7]

Lastly, children were able to gain self-esteem because of the sense of satisfaction which play provided. As previously discussed under the theme "Playing is fun and therefore it helps bring about a positive attitude towards school," children enjoyed the play episodes because:

1) they were able to explore ("I discovered baby blue . . . it was fun");

2) it allowed them to be creative ("I thought junk was fun because I made a Christmas tree out of creapt papeer and buttons and toilet rolls . . . it was really fun");

3) they could use their imagination ("I used pipe cleaners, cotton balls, paper bag, goofy eyes, tie, glue and my imagination");

4) they were able to complete a product ("The activities I did today was great. I got to do a activitie and get to bring it home");

5) the play allowed them to recover from a previous setback (". . . Narinder, Donna and I went to the sandbox it was fun because the last time I worked with the sand we flooded the sink. This time we didn't all we did was we made a castle").

To this point I have tried to link the themes arising from the data to a holistic connection of the self with the Self. Miller has claimed that this connection can be established only if we start with a sufficiently strong ego. A strong ego, he maintains, can be attained through a high degree of self-esteem which, in turn, is gained from feelings of competence (1993, p. 121). Miller states that such an emotion can be acquired from the abilities to read, write, and do problem solving. Although I agree with
Miller, I would also suggest that, in many cases, it is difficult for many children to attain the success in the academic areas which he proposes. Thus, I have reasoned that if children are to acquire self-esteem they must be able to achieve success through other avenues. Play, as I have tried to show, offers one alternative means to provide this success.

In a paradoxical way, however, play contributes to the wholeness of the self because it precludes the need for certain ego desires. Ordinarily, Miller argues, “Our ego sees our self as separate from everyone else and often competing with others in a never-ending struggle” (1996, p. 9). In the normal course of events in school, children are drawn into competition either explicitly (through tests, for example) or implicitly (through heterogeneous reading groups as chosen by the teacher and evaluation which is often carried out on a comparative basis). In fact, aside from the recent venture into cooperative learning, our school system is based on a very individualistic, competitive practice in which those who do well reap the benefits of praise and high marks. Unfortunately, those who do not do well academically find themselves estranged and alienated in a system which seems to benefit only the brightest.

During play, however, there is no need to satisfy the usual ego requirements because children are not in a position in which they have to compete either with themselves or against each other. Therefore, they do not have to assume any particular role which they might usually adopt either because they feel adults expect it of them or because they expect it of themselves. This predicament reminds me of a former student who was considered a model pupil - bright, well-behaved, diligent, and innocent. Yet this same child showed an entirely different side to her personality as she wrote in a personal diary (which came into my possession quite by accident). By giving vent to her true feelings she was able to free herself from a great deal of hostility and repression which otherwise might have resulted in the emergence of a number of
neurotic symptoms.

In a somewhat similar fashion, play can also contribute to a child’s emotional well-being because it provides a release from the usual state of always having to put forth a front to satisfy ego desires. The play data indicated several instances when children rid themselves of their customary roles and, by doing so, helped themselves become more whole. For instance, Allen usually tried to compensate for his inadequacies in school by mocking other people’s mistakes, interfering with their play during recess, and disparaging other people’s accomplishments. However, as the following extract points out, Allen demonstrated a generosity of spirit during classroom play which might not otherwise have become apparent: “Hary madde a Bote ot of pske steks it rele looks hood in a wae” [Harry made a boat out of popsicle sticks. It really looks good in a way].

Children rarely have the opportunity to regard other people’s work during the regular course of the school day because they are so focused on themselves. Play temporarily provides them with the chance to forget about satisfying their own ego desires and allows them to be generous in their consideration of others. The following instance demonstrates how one child experienced the pleasure of others’ acknowledgement of a picture she had completed with several of her peers: “Everybody was asking how we made it, and that is very nice.”

Aside from compliments about their colleagues’ play, there were other indications of student magnanimity which might never have surfaced had it not been for play. For instance, as I have already discussed in the section dealing with connections among others, Helen described her surprise and elation (“I codint be [believe] it wen Donna [was] so nice to me”) at Donna’s congeniality. As previously mentioned, Helen was socially isolated from the other children, particularly a group of girls who formed the most popular clique in the class. Donna, as one of the leaders of
this group, was usually quite snobbish and disdainful of anyone who was not part of this select few. According to Helen, however, during one play episode at least, Donna did not assume her customary social posturing. Instead of the distant, haughty stance which her ego usually demanded she assume, Donna could allow herself to be magnanimous. Since she did not feel compelled to act in a way in which her ego demanded gratification, she was able to allow her true nature to emerge and, in so doing, she became more whole.

In its desire to connect the self with the Self, holistic education aims at the spiritual aspect of the child. In this endeavor it uses meditation and contemplation to help children connect with their inner selves. In both cases it is hoping to “quiet and focus the mind [to] move to a more receptive mode of consciousness” as opposed to “an active mode of consciousness [in which] the mind is continually chattering, planning and manipulating” (Miller, 1996, p. 168). Miller likens this “active mind” to a “reflection of our ego which is usually attempting to manipulate the world according to its own need for gratification” (1996, p. 168). Although classroom play did not in any way overtly resemble any form of contemplation or meditation, I would contend that it did in fact achieve, to some extent at least, the same results.

One method employed by holistic education to raise self-esteem and gain inner peace is through the use of a mantra whereby the child repeats a message to herself again and again (for example, “No matter what you say or do to me, I am still a worthwhile person”). According to holistic thinking, children will then attain a level of confidence which will contribute to their inner life. A number of examples have already been cited from the data which demonstrate how play has significantly contributed to children’s confidence, self-esteem and, according to holistic thinking, their inner life as well. Furthermore, we are told that the intention of contemplation and meditation is to calm the mind and make it less susceptible to the usual ego desires for gratification. In
In this respect, play has similar effects on children. We have seen how, during play, a child is not compelled to produce correctness because the need for external praise and reward is precluded by play’s emphasis on process, not product. In Donna’s treatment of Helen, we conclude that, through play, Donna did not feel the usual ego pressures to assert herself socially in her usual high and mighty ways. During play, children experience a sense of freedom from ego desires which they might not otherwise perceive. In this respect, then, I would contend that play does in fact contribute to the inner life of the child.

It could be argued further that play also resembles contemplation and meditation and serves the same function in the atmosphere it sometimes creates. When meditation is practised in a holistic classroom, there is a quiet calmness which fills the air. And although I have described the classroom as being rather noisy during the play, I have also stated under theme four that “the noise would often subside into lulls which were so incongruous with the setting” and that “the children are so engrossed in their activity that it is strangely quiet.” Hence, one might conceivably argue that, at times, the atmosphere resulting from play is similar to that created in a holistic classroom in which meditation is being practised.

Miller also tells us that “we can try to foster the spiritual growth of the student by working on ourselves as teachers to become more conscious and caring” (1996, p. 183). Through self-knowledge and compassion, teachers can become inwardly centred and, once this condition is met, there exists the likelihood that “the child’s behavior will probably reflect this level of consciousness” (Miller, 1993, p. 17). Hence, the spiritual or inner life of the child will also be affected. In discussing the holistic connection between self and community, I referred to the teacher’s obligation to be genuine in his relationships with his students. When a teacher, in the presence of his students, is able to focus on the here and now and not concern himself with the next
lesson to be taught or his after-school commitments or anything other than what he is presently doing, he is becoming centred and whole. Miller reasons that by becoming centred we can more easily learn to accept ourselves and, by learning to do that, we can also learn to accept others (1996, p. 138).

Miller also suggests that we can begin to discover ourselves if we “immerse ourselves in play” (1993, p. 87). In his words, “play casts a spell over us; it is enchanting, captivating. . . . Children enter into play easily and naturally. Play is one of their basic ways of dealing with the world and is extremely important to their growth and development” (1993, p. 85). Through my own participation in the children’s classroom play, I was also able to meet many of the criteria of holistic thinking. First, I was learning “to be” with children. I was not concerned with covering a certain amount of material in a certain period of time and, for a brief spell, teaching was “a more relaxing and enjoyable experience” (Miller, 1996, p. 134). Secondly, by focusing on the here and now, I was learning to be “centred.” According to Miller, “being in the here and now enhances our compassion since there is less likelihood that we can become lost in our illusions” (1993, p. 138). By learning to accept ourselves, we enhance our compassion because we learn to accept others. “The teacher who is holistically authentic realizes there is a link between one’s consciousness or inner life and other beings” (Miller, 1996, p. 178). In summary, holistic education begins with a teacher who is truly mindful of his students because he is attending to them and not thinking extraneous thoughts. This mindful teacher is centred or whole because he is accepting of himself and of others. The ensuing compassion which he now feels not only permits the teacher to establish a caring relationship with his students but it also allows him to connect with his own inner self. The teacher who is more attuned to his consciousness can then also affect the spiritual growth of his students. One means by which the teacher can connect to his Self and by which children can then vicariously
connect to theirs is to “see a child at play” (Miller, 1996, p. 9). Simply to engage in such a research project as the study of children’s play would then, according to Miller, connect the teacher’s self to his Self, and, as I have argued, contribute to the child’s inner life as well. Additionally, occasions when I participated with the children in their play (“So me, Mr. Silver and P. played ‘Number in Order.’ I won two games, P. won one game and Mr. Silver didn’t win at all but I am shure he had fun. Poor Mr. Silver he didn’t win anything”) not only helped cement the self - community connection but it also brought me into closer touch with my own Self. In raising my consciousness, according to holistic thinking, I was also helping the children raise theirs.

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<th>Holistic Connection</th>
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<tr>
<td>Linear Thinking and Intuition</td>
<td>Play enables children to experience pleasure, pride, success, and self-esteem (3)</td>
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<td>Play is a learning device (7)</td>
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<td>Play facilitates creativity, imagination, and the expression of fantasies (9)</td>
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Holistic education seeks to address the imbalance in schools between analytical thinking and intuition. The former involves a sequential, observable process and is the form of cognition which is primarily practised in schools today. In contrast, intuition is “direct knowing” (Miller, 1996, p. 88), a form of insight which, for example, signals stress, clarifies a complicated idea, or generates artistic expression. Holistic education tells us that intuition is essential to creativity and that child pedagogy requires a balance between analysis and insight (Miller, 1996, p. 91). Play has an

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requires a balance between analysis and insight (Miller, 1996, p. 91). Play has an important role to play in securing this balance because one requires an active inner life in order to gain intuition. Unfortunately, according to Miller:

... our society and schools give very little room for the development of our inner life. ... Television and videos provide little opportunity for any sort of inner imaginative response. At least with the radio, when there was drama, we were encouraged to use our own imagination to construct a picture of what was happening. Today we have little opportunity to develop an inner imaginative response and as a result the inner life is impoverished. (1993, p. 24)

Many of the play episodes described filled this void since they forced children to use their imaginations. In describing how he felt about his play one child wrote: “The activity was great. The thing’s that’s so great about it is I made it... My invention you have to use your emarnation [imagination].” In another instance children applied their imaginations to experiment with paints:

I went on Carol’s side [of the easel] and started mixing colours. When time was up I took my picture off the easel and folded it together because I wanted to see how it would look when I unfolded it. When I opened it up I saw a little butterfly in it, so instead of garbaging it, I kept it.

Other children used their imaginations to be creative in a number of different ways and milieus: at cut and paste to make an “adjustable hockey stick”; at the sandbox to create a town “which was intersected by a river that flooded and needed to be dammed”; and at the junk center to construct guns, robots, and puppets. One of the more salient examples of the use of imagination, however, did not involve the use of any materials or props whatsoever. A popular activity, particularly among the girls, was to enact skits around such topics as the “supply teacher” and the “killer baby-sitter.” The children’s
desire to use make-believe does not diminish as children progress through elementary school (1973, p. 14). His suggestion that children need to exercise their imagination is used by holistic educators as one more indication that intuition should be part of child pedagogy. If children do not develop their imaginations, he argues, it may lead to:

delinquency, violence, overeating and the use of dangerous drugs. . . . studies indicate that those individuals with an underdeveloped inner life seem to be more vulnerable to external stimuli. Thus, a developed inner life connected to intuition and imagination can be a source of autonomy. (as cited in Miller, 1996, p. 92).

Hence, holistic education, as practised in the Waldorf school, bases its elementary school years on the imagination and not the intellect.

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<td>Body-Mind Connection</td>
<td>Effects of play on classroom climate (4)</td>
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<td>Play gives rise to fantasies of aggression (5)</td>
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<td>Play facilitates creativity, imagination, and the expression of fantasies (9)</td>
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<td>The influence of gender on play (11)</td>
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<td>Play enables children to deal with frustration and disappointment in a positive manner (12)</td>
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In contrast to the general state of affairs within our schools in which “feelings are taken for granted” (Miller, 1996, p. 109), holistic educators incorporate the affective
domain into the curriculum. Unlike traditional schools where feelings have either been ignored or repressed because "they have been viewed as interfering with rational processes", [holistic schools believe that] "it is important to be aware of and acknowledge our emotions" (Miller, 1993, p. 37). One of the means by which holistic schools help children to work out their fears, anxieties, and anger is through a technique called psychodrama. With this method a group of children may act out an emotional situation under the guidance of a teacher or therapist. In the play which was conducted in the classroom, the children also acted out scenarios which demonstrated their feelings, albeit without the coaxing of an adult. For instance, in the skit which dramatized the revenge of a mother's death by her daughter, children acted out their anxieties about death and their desire for moral retribution. Many children, as mentioned in the discussion of theme number nine, chose to work out their confusions about death through drama. By playing out their fantasies about death, some children were better able come to terms with the ugly, violent scenes which they see depicted on television and in movies. Others chose to work out their aggressive feelings by constructing weapons and then engaging in mock fights. In one instance, discussed under theme eleven, play afforded girls an opportunity to be aggressive, a role which they seemed to relish but which they rarely chose.

Play also allowed children to reveal their joyful emotions as well. As they acted out the scene in which the supply teacher was at her wits' end trying to cope with a group of recalcitrant students, the children demonstrated their sense of fun and naughtiness. For a few moments, at least, they could be as rude and mischievous as they wanted without any threat of punishment. Unlike the normal state of affairs, they could assume a position of power which enabled them to be as bossy and mean as older brothers and sisters may have been to them. In short, they could use the play to act out feelings which they might have no other way of understanding or expressing.
Children were able to take advantage of the play opportunities in another vital emotional aspect. It provided them with a mechanism to work out frustration in healthy, non-destructive ways. In redoing, modifying, or even discarding their activity, children could assuage their frustration without undue stress. The child who rebuilt her house after it broke and the students who converted a “volcano” into a “well” learned that they could cope with frustration creatively by using their imaginations and their hands. Thus, the mind-body connection they had made enabled them to deal positively with their emotions.

Holistic educators also associate physical development with the body-mind connection because they understand that physical needs are important for the development of the whole self. Thus, holistic curriculum calls for a physical education programme which is not oriented to satisfy ego desires (such as losing weight or improving muscle tone) but which is designed to help the body connect to its consciousness (Miller, 1996, p. 110). It employs methods like movement, dance, and rhythm to bring this to fruition. The play which took place in this research study did not involve any overt attempts to help connect the mind with the body. Nevertheless, the psychology which is employed in the holistic classroom with respect to physical activity was also present with play. Under the theme entitled “The effects of play on classroom climate,” I described a setting in which children were not confined to their seats but were standing and walking about continually. Play, by definition, involves an active engagement by its participants and, by being allowed to move from place to place, children could follow their natural instincts. By not imposing the unnatural demand to sit for long periods of time confined to their desks and by recognizing the need to stretch, to walk, and to be free, play permitted the children to make a similar connection between the mind and the body as with holistic education. What matters most is not the instruction but the understanding that an awareness of self has to take
place in an environment which permits the freedom to pursue one’s natural
tendencies. Play helped to create that sense.

Not all the connections associated with holistic curriculum have been discussed
with reference to the play themes. However, before concluding this chapter, I would
like to make the following observations concerning play and the two other holistic
criteria. I did not see how play could be compatible, for instance, with subject - subject
connections. Play, as I have defined it, is spontaneous and in the control of the child.
Any attempt to coerce the child to connect the play with school subjects would subvert
the play since it would now be the teacher, not the child, who would be determining
the direction the play would go. Playlike activities (such as asking a child to paint a
picture of a favourite character from a novel she read) can help integrate the subjects
and enhance the child’s understanding. Nevertheless, one should recognize that this
is not play as it has been defined for the purposes of this study since it is neither
spontaneous nor process-oriented.

There are, however, some valid comparisons which can be made between play
and the holistic curriculum notion of Earth Connections. Miller tells us that one of the
shortcomings of today’s schools is that they still value “theories instead of values,
concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, ideology
and efficiency rather than conscience (1996, p. 153). In stressing “cleverness over
wisdom” (p. 153), schools attend to the intellect and ignore the social, emotional, and
physical self which holistic curriculum and play both emphasize. When Miller writes
that “in working with Earth Connections our aim is to instill what Schweitzer called
‘reverence for life’” (p. 162), he appeals to those advocates of play who understand
that “the way we learn is as important as what we learn” (1996, p. 153).

In this chapter I have organized the results of classroom play into a holistic
context since play and holistic education involve the child's whole self. To see how play and holistic education were compatible, I categorized events arising from the themes according to holistic criteria. In some respects the similarities were quite obvious while in other cases comparisons were not as clear. What is important to remember, however, is that even though the techniques employed in a holistic classroom may seemingly have little in common with play, much of the psychology and many of the results are alike. In the concluding chapter I discuss the implications of my study on education practices.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (Ginott, 1972, p. 317)

This chapter represents the conclusion of what has been a long and difficult task, yet one which has enlightened me in each of my roles as a researcher and teacher. My investigation has helped me not only to discover the many ways in which children benefit from play but also, and more significantly, it has enabled me to gain a greater understanding of children. Through observation, interviewing and analysis, I began to appreciate them for more than just their intellectual achievement. Through my occasional participation with them in their play, I was able to gain a rapport which would otherwise not have been possible. Moreover, by reflecting on their play and by completing this study, I gained insight into my own role as a classroom teacher, a role which has allowed me to become the kind of person who has gained an awareness which Froebel understood when he stated: "Play is not trivial: it is highly serious and of deep significance. To the calm, keen vision of one who truly knows, the spontaneous play of the child discloses the future inner life of the man" (as cited in Hughes J., 1950, p. 124).

In this last chapter I discuss the significance of this study, implications for the inclusion of play as part of the elementary curriculum, and my own personal reflections as a result of completing this research.
Significance of the Study

There are three major reasons why this study is important. The first has to do with its effects on my role as a classroom teacher. I believe that I now have greater insight into how a thoughtful teacher should behave and what the priorities of teaching should be. The effects of my revelation have had an impact on the lives of the students I have taught during the course of this project and will, I trust, no doubt influence the children I hope to teach in the future.

Secondly, this study is methodologically significant because it has not simply relied upon an adult’s observations and perceptions in order to arrive at the conclusions drawn from classroom play. On the contrary, it has drawn upon children’s own thoughts and feelings to access their perspectives on what the effects of classroom play are. Studies of children’s play have traditionally focused on early childhood and have, by necessity, because of the young child’s lack of verbal facility, relied on the researcher’s interpretation of events to arrive at hypotheses. In this research project, it was, by and large, the children themselves who supplied the data which led to my conclusions. For this reason my research was a truly phenomenological study of children. In this respect, then, it may lie much closer to a realistic interpretation of events related to children than other studies do. Corsaro tries to outline the difficulty of adult research into children’s activities in the following statement:

A major problem in ethnographic work with young children has to do with adult conceptions of children’s activities and abilities. As adults we often tend to explain away what we do not understand about children’s behavior as unimportant, that is silly or we restructure what is problematic to bring it in line with an adult view of the world. (1981, p. 119)
Therefore, since this study has not had to rely solely on an adult's view of what children think and feel, the conclusions which I have drawn may be much closer to reality than other research about children which looks at events through the eyes of an adult.

By completing this study I feel that I have contributed academic knowledge to the subject of play with respect to children in general. In particular, however, I believe that this study is unique because it explores an area which has previously been unexplored. As I discussed in Chapter One, there has been little documentation for classroom play with upper elementary schoolchildren. The arguments I have presented, then, lay the groundwork for future research in an area which researchers have virtually ignored. Moreover, in the tradition of action research, I have examined my own classroom practices as a means of improving the program I deliver. Having seen the benefits which accrue from play, I now allocate some time during the school week in which play can be integrated into the classroom for each and every child.

Political Implications for the Inclusion of Play in Elementary Schools

Play has traditionally been included in early childhood education but because of the emphasis on achievement as opposed to child development, it has not been incorporated within the elementary school curriculum. One might assume, given the political and economic climate of the day, that play would never be considered for inclusion within the elementary schools. However, there are enough indications provided by this study to suggest that play is worthy of consideration as part and parcel of the elementary child's school day. Yet, given the current political landscape, the likelihood that this will happen is remote.
The role of play, according to Spariosu, has always been politically defined (as cited in Finkelstein, 1987, p. 20). Historians of play “see it [play] as being killed off by a western love of rationality, regulation, productivity and work in the service of domination and control” (p. 20). As far as Finkelstein is concerned, historians of children’s play either believe that schools are “liberating institutions, freeing children to play. . . [or that they are] regulatory institutions, directing and constraining children’s play” (p. 20). The role of play, then, seems to be both a political and philosophical argument which is related to the purpose of schools and education. In concluding my findings, it is this subject which I will now address.

In order to define the role of play for elementary schools, if it is to have any role at all, one needs to outline what an education should provide. On the one hand, there is the prevailing school of thought which states that the goal of schools should be intellectual achievement. In this sense we see a return to an essentialist philosophy which seeks to inculcate knowledge by direct instruction, standardized testing, and strict objectives with respect to curriculum. School in this sense is dominated by an engineering conception which Donmoyer tells us is “characterized by an absence of play (except at recess), extrinsic goals, and on the control and direction of students rather than on their spontaneous and voluntary participation” (1981, p. 11). Schools which adhere to this description want to provide children with the knowledge and skills which will translate into immediate gains on achievement tests. In this respect, Glickman’s depiction of the educational arena in 1984 seems prophetically insightful as we witness our present state of affairs:

The times in which we sit are again characterized as essentialist. The political and social climate is one of fiscal austerity and accountability for predetermined ends. Schools have been reduced in budget, staff, and materials. Schools are being asked to limit their purpose and to focus on reversing declining
achievement scores. (p. 268)

If the role of the schools is simply to increase academic achievement, then, Glickman maintains, we should simply adhere to the essentialist position of direct instruction as the primary means of learning in which case “play should not be part of the curriculum” (1984, p. 267).

On the other hand, there is a school of thought which views education as more than simply the acquisition of high marks on achievement tests. Hall and Dennis, for instance, emphasized the importance of looking at the whole child when they said that “teachers need to be inspired by a philosophy which puts foremost the needs and dignity of the child” (1968, p. 17). If such is the case, teachers must look at students as individuals who require more than direct instruction to satisfy their needs. Children in elementary schools, as I have indicated, cannot be made to sit still for extended periods of time and be receptacles for knowledge transmitted by a teacher at the front of the class. As much as they need to achieve literacy and numeracy, children also require movement, the opportunity to cooperate with their peers, the freedom to risk failure, the chance to experience success, and to acquire a sense of fun. As I have endeavored to show, play can help to fulfill each of these objectives.

Carl Rogers has said:

... the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has realized that no one is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Changingness, a reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes sense as a goal for education in the modern world. (1969, p. 104)

Play, by its very definition, is a dynamic activity because it is concerned with the process of learning rather than with the product. Moreover, it entails the active
participation of the student unlike the passive absorption of transmission learning. The implementation of play would, then, seem to be conducive to the attainment of the goal which Rogers defines.

Thus, we see that we have two very separate and distinct approaches to education. Which do we choose? After spending over twenty years in the classroom and learning about children through courses, professional readings, and observation, I know that there is no one simple answer. As an educator and parent of two children who have graduated from the public school system, I acknowledge the need for high academic standards and achievement by our pupils. I daresay that there is not a teacher who would disagree. At the same time we must never forget that we are dealing with human beings here and small, immature, undeveloped ones at that. In our quest to educate, we must not abandon child development principles. Children, whether they are preschoolers or adolescents, require a pedagogy which does not cater to the academic progress of children at the expense of other needs. To do so results in poor self-esteem, an unfavourable disposition towards school, misbehavior, a lack of trust between teacher and student, and learning problems.

As I indicated in Chapter Four, a great many schoolchildren are not able to gain the success levels which we hope they will achieve for a number of reasons. E.S.L. children, for instance, lack the verbal facility in the language of instruction which will enable them to master the skills outlined in our outcomes-based guidelines. Experts have postulated that it may take as many as seven years for children who come from a foreign culture to overcome their lack of English skills. Other children may develop learning difficulties which also prevent them from attaining specifically uniform standards which the Ministry of Education have set. In no way whatsoever am I looking for excuses which will absolve the school system for its failure to address the needs of all students. Certainly, I would acknowledge that there are pupils who do not always
succeed and that the schools must assume at least partial responsibility. As a teacher within that system I realize that there are problems to be addressed and goals towards which to strive. Thus, I understand the call for measures which are essentialist by nature (such as the use of spelling textbooks, the return to basal reading instruction, and even, to a certain extent, a greater frequency of standardized tests).

However, I also realize that even with these components of transmission, some children will still not attain the levels of success school boards have demanded. Even for those who do, the question which still needs to be asked is whether we are doing justice to these seemingly successful children? Is it sufficient simply to provide students with the tools which will ensure academic success? Do we fulfill our mandate by enabling children to develop their intelligence? Or is education an even broader, more noble pursuit? In addition to the acquisition of knowledge and skills which we, as teachers, all want our pupils to acquire, do we not also want to instill in them an attitude which is respectful and considerate of others, which fosters a sense of enjoyment, a love of learning, and the capacity to feel good about themselves? If these are indeed the objectives of education, then we must remember to provide opportunities to let them play.

By using a holistic framework to contextualize the data, I was able to justify the inclusion of play within schools so long as I subscribed to an existentialist philosophy and a belief that the school must address the needs of the whole child. As much as I see value in many of the practices adopted by the Waldorf school, it is not so much the programmes that are of benefit to children as it is the philosophy upon which they are based. For me the primary value of holistic education and play lies in their contribution to self-awareness. Holistic education uses fairy tales, dance, yoga, and meditation along with other techniques to help the child make the connections to their souls. Play too can help children discover their true selves albeit in a more implicit manner. In the
first place, it provides children with the confidence needed to acquire self-esteem. Thus, children do not have to fear looking inward because they will be afraid of what they see. Failures, inadequacies, and insecurities are not encountered in play as they are perhaps in other circumstances. Secondly, play facilitates a child’s self-awareness in a vicarious manner. Through play, a teacher can learn to care for children, to be mindful of them, and to enhance his own self-awareness. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the teacher’s self-awareness will lead to the child’s raised consciousness. It is this heightened perception which leads to a true and deep understanding of oneself which is as vital to a child’s education as the acquisition of skills and knowledge, as well as the ability to think.

For this reason I would say that to the goals of education we must also add self-learning. Self-learning is only possible when children are taught by a teacher who embodies the characteristics which Weininger describes in the following:

When I think of the teacher in our system, I think of a person who literally creates the environment in which the child can continue to develop the growing awareness of himself... Learning and teaching, then, is a process of learning oneself. In the process of this learning, a quality of humanness and sensitivity is developed without the desire to always be right... Guidance, not interference; criticism, not punitiveness; humanness, not mechanicalness - these are the teaching tools of a system truly dedicated to the teaching of children. (1979, p. 64)

In conclusion, I maintain that there are three goals of education which must be addressed if we are to provide children with all that they need. First we have to attend to children’s academic achievement by providing them with an education which will ensure the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for school success. Secondly, we must focus on the emotional and social as well as the cognitive
domains if we are to serve the needs of the whole child. Thirdly, we have to provide children with the means to self-learning so that they are able to connect with their inner selves. To realize these goals we have to provide a balance which integrates the philosophies and practices of transmission, pragmatism, and existentialism. We need to recognize that, in our enthusiasm for high achievement and the development of intelligence, the need for self-realization is also crucial and perhaps paramount since so much of a child’s performance is governed by her self-concept. Moreover, we can facilitate self-learning by slowing down the hurried pace we have set for today’s students. If we can allow them to enjoy a childhood in which they are free to control their world for at least some part of the time, when they are not solely concerned with the product of their effort, when they are actively involved in their imaginative pursuits, in short when they are allowed to play, then and only then, will we have succeeded in truly educating our children.

A Personal Reflection

I first embarked on this project at a crossroads in my teaching career. For a number of reasons, I had reached a point at which I needed to sustain my interest in teaching. I had learned through experience, trial and error, and with great humility, how to do my job quite competently. Although I had never articulated my own philosophy of teaching, I might have said at that point that it included the following principles: a high level of expectancy with respect to behavior and performance; an active, hands-on approach to learning; and a desire to make school work interesting and relevant to children’s lives. For these reasons I tried to provide a programme for children which included the manipulation of concrete materials, assignments which engaged the students by appealing to their interests and backgrounds, and some
variety in the activities from which children could choose.

Although I felt that I had attained an adequate level of professionalism by that point in my career and, although it might be said that I enjoyed good rapport with my classes, nevertheless, I was occasionally troubled by my dealings with difficult students. I would, at times, berate myself for having shouted, bullied, or otherwise lost my temper. Although I could rationalize my angry reactions as being justified, I was, nonetheless, ashamed and disappointed by my loss of control. Although my actions were not uncommon and even paled in comparison with those of some of my colleagues, I was still not happy with my outbursts. Perhaps it was this dissatisfaction with myself which was a motivating factor in my decision to become a play therapist.

Learning about play has helped my development as a teacher and, more importantly, as a human being, in several crucial ways. As I work with children now, particularly during one-to-one situations, I still sometimes find myself frustrated by their failure to grasp a particular concept or recite a certain fact. The heightened awareness of my feelings which has been facilitated by my studies allows me to remember that I am teaching children, not subjects. Hence, I am able to remind myself that I need to be as concerned with the process of learning as with the product. The child who sits beside me is far more likely to learn if I can provide an atmosphere which eliminates the fear factor. As Ginott has said when responding to teachers who want to motivate their students to learn: “Make it safe for them to risk failure. The major obstacle to learning is fear: fear of failure, fear of criticism, fear of appearing stupid. An effective teacher makes it possible for each child to err with impunity” (1972, p. 235). My awareness of this advice prompts me to lighten the atmosphere, ease the tension on the child, and remove the threat of rebuke or censure. What is never at issue now is the humaneness with which I treat the child. My ability to exercise understanding and patience together with my integration of child development principles has provided me
with confidence and calmness or, to put it, in holistic terms, an inner peace and a sense of Self. If Miller is correct when he says that teachers who are connected to their inner selves also enable students to achieve self-awareness, then I am doing far more for my students than simply teaching them to read and write.

Nowhere is the teacher’s humanity made more evident than during play, for while children are at play, the teacher need not concern himself with his usual roles of disciplinarian, instructor, and evaluator. In fact, play often enables the teacher and child to come closer together. Play levels the field between teacher and child who now become equals and can learn from each other. During play, children can see their teacher for who he really is - a person who is human and who enjoys being with children. As a human being he demonstrates his fallibility, his ability to cope with losing, his willingness to cooperate, and his capacity for laughter. Hall and Dennis referred to this need for laughter in Living and Learning when they said:

Our children need to acquire perspective with a sense of humour and humility. Laughter is the safety valve of most human beings. . . . By learning to laugh at ourselves, to laugh at our failings and our idiosyncracies, we learn to understand frailties and shortcomings in others. (1968, p. 46)

Through the demonstration of this very human quality, the child sees the teacher in a different light and the relationship between student and teacher is strengthened.

During play I also witnessed a closer association between myself and my students. At those times we would laugh, take turns, cooperate, and share. I learned more about Mary, for instance, through our play together than I ever did in my usual capacity as the teacher at the front of the class. And she learned enough about me that she could allow her true personality, a side to which I had never been privy, to emerge. This was just one indication which confirmed Chaillé and Silvern’s observation that “the child comes to understand the world and the adult comes to understand the child
Moreover, by demonstrating human qualities, I model for students the attributes that I hope they will integrate into their own behavior with their peers inside and outside the classroom.

Anna Freud once said:

The universal aim of education is always to make out of the child a grown-up world around him. Consequently, we have here the starting point for education. It regards as childlike behavior everything in which the child differs from the adult. (1935, p. 45)

Previous to the readings, observations, and experiences which this research entailed, I believe, in retrospect, that I shared a similar attitude towards children as expressed here by Freud. Now, however, having incorporated child development principles into my own classroom, I believe that the rationale for elementary schools needs to be more than just high marks.

In spite of the unceasing rhetoric calling for greater achievement by Ontario students, I understand the need for appreciating the process as well as the product of teaching. No longer do I always maintain a strict, oppressive, authoritarian classroom environment in which children are stifled and made to keep quiet. Now I look for opportunities where children can exercise their individuality by creative expression and movement. No longer do I insist on lengthy periods of pencil and paper assignments where children are confined to their desks; now I provide occasions for students to work collaboratively in a lively, sometimes noisy atmosphere. No longer do I always compel students to sit for lengthy periods in large groups listening silently to instructions and stories; now I understand the difficulty for many students who are forced to sit still and thus, I try to keep the length of these assemblies to a minimum. No longer do I provoke confrontation between recalcitrant students and myself; now I seek other ways in which angry children can sublimate their hostility in creative outlets.
(often through play) which reduce their animosity. No longer do I require all children to complete their work before they are allowed to play; now I understand that it is often those children who do not finish assignments who are likely to need play the most. Therefore, I ensure that all children, even those who are not high achievers, have the opportunity to play. No longer do I present myself as the adult who must remain earnest and didactic at all times; now I allow myself to relax and truly "be" with children instead of always planning ahead and thinking about what we need to cover in the way of curriculum. In this respect, I try to bring about an air of playfulness in my relations with children.

This quality enables me to enter the world of the child who, as I have previously suggested, is often suspicious of adults. Injecting play and a sense of playfulness into the classroom, however, can bring the teacher and child closer together. For Block, "adding a playlike quality to current classroom activities connotes for students that they have some measure of control over their school learning destinies in terms of substance, form, motives and standards" (1984/85, p. 66). For me, playfulness is vital for its contribution to the classroom climate. By maintaining a pleasant, jovial atmosphere I believe I am providing children with the comfort which allows them to take risks, to make errors, and to learn. Spodek and Saracho acknowledge the need for playfulness when they say:

Learning can occur in a context of playfulness. The essence of good teaching lies in this ability to think about the needs of young children, to respond, to intervene without unnecessary interference and distortion. Perhaps this requires adults who themselves bring a quality of playfulness as well as respect to their relations with children. (1988, p. 21)
The Hurried Child

As I discussed in Chapter One, a major tendency in today's society seems to be the disappearance of childhood for many children. There are a number of factors which account for this trend. Advances in technology, for instance, have enabled children to enter worlds with which they are not adequately prepared to cope. Television and the World Wide Web provide enticing programmes which may not be appropriate for impressionable, young minds. Despite the pleas of parents for controls over the media, it seems to me that there is very little in the way of regulations which are likely to reverse this trend. As a result of family pressures arising from marital breakdowns or financial difficulties, many children are faced with an increased amount of solitary time. Instead of childlike pursuits such as skipping and playground hockey with their friends, many children find themselves in front of the television or the computer where they invariably turn to adult programming. Other children, as previously described, are rushed into competitive leagues as early as the age of six. Some adults have also encouraged the disappearance of childhood by attacking the school system for not providing a more sophisticated curriculum ("In Grade 2 they should be good in division, and should already be proficient in their third language" [Giles, 1992, p. A24]). All these factors have contributed to a society which is depriving many children of their childhood by insisting that they grow up sooner rather than later.

For this reason I feel a responsibility to prolong childhood for as long as possible by providing children with opportunities in which they can still be children. In this respect, I agree with educators such as Peter Blos who advocated a continuance of childhood not just for elementary school children but for adolescents as well. In his words:

I submit that a prolongation, rather than an abbreviation of childhood is desirable if not, indeed, imperative. The young adolescent of 13 - regardless of
desirable if not, indeed, imperative. The young adolescent of 13 - regardless of his primary and secondary characteristics - is still psychologically, a child. This fact should be acknowledged by family, by school and by society at large. These institutions must continue to extend their containing and protective roles, rather than push the young adolescent ahead under the misleading banner of “the earlier and the faster, the bigger and the better.” (1979, p. 204)

Blos believed that the extension of childhood for adolescents would provide “additional time for the acquisition of that body of factual knowledge . . . which is later put to integrative use, when meaningfulness and relevancy of knowledge and learning move into the forefront of the educational experience” (1979, p. 204).

It is for this reason, as I have mentioned, that Steiner emphasizes the emotional domain in what he has termed the etheric stage of development from the ages of seven to eleven. During this period of the child’s schooling, the fairy tale is used as a building block for learning because it lends itself to the use of the imagination and to a sense of moral rectitude. By fostering the emotional development of children, he feels that children will learn more easily when they enter the stage of formal operations. Moreover, Steiner contends:

> Children, by their very nature, want to play; they do not want to act with the sense of careful purpose demanded of us in later life. . . . If they can play properly and healthily at the age when they ought to be playing, they will work dutifully and healthily when the time comes to work. (1970, p. 93)

Hence, in order to prolong the childhood of my students, I, too, encourage the children to play within the classroom by providing time, freedom, and materials without condition. Moreover, I utilize a sand table, plasticine, and an easel, items which are unlikely to be found in most other Junior Division classrooms. I facilitate the practice of drama by the creation of a center equipped with puppets and props which the children
drama diminishes during middle childhood, nevertheless, some children still choose this activity as a means of enjoyment and self-expression. According to Singer, the child's participation in drama has positive effects not only for the child's psyche but for the school environment as well. As he says, "If the present suppression of overt make-believe play in children from school age on could be reversed and socio-dramatic tendencies put to effective use, school itself might become more interesting" (1973, p. 74). Weininger also pleads for the inclusion of play in the school curriculum when he states, "If the classroom does not permit or encourage play activity, the class is empty and full of monotony" (1979, p. 146).

Drama is just one of the elements I incorporate into the play activities in order to foster an environment which is not only enjoyable and stimulating for the students but which is also conducive to success. School's major concern is with the acquisition of knowledge and skills which lead to academic achievement. Since some children will inevitably find academic success difficult to attain, it is incumbent on teachers to develop alternative avenues which will allow those students to feel competent. Play is one such approach. A number of examples from my observations attest to the ability of play to provide low-achieving students with feelings of accomplishment: Paul, the boy who chose to play with plasticine; Helen, who was able to teach her classmate a computer game; Yusuf, who used Tinkertoy materials to build trucks; and finally Allen, who had so much difficulty with reading and writing assignments that he was constantly misbehaving, but who would use plasticine to make a plane with enthusiasm and with confidence. If teachers feel it is their responsibility to find ways in which all students can feel successful, then they would be wise to heed Daiute's advice which was cited in Chapter Two; namely, "to provide more bridges between what [they] expect [their] students to do and what they do well. Since children are expert players play may be one of those bridges" (1989, p. 21).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Statement of Support for Research Study by School Administrator

April 26, 1995

To Whom It May Concern:

I have discussed and observed Mr. Allan Silver's project "A Qualitative Analysis of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Classroom Play for Junior Division School Children."

I support the contention that these grade 5 pupils may benefit from some unstructured parts of their school day in an exploration or play mode. These opportunities for decision making, making choices, cooperative learning all come into play in the development of the whole child.

I look forward to the positive effects on pupils and to the results of Mr. Silver's study. I do not feel this project creates any emotional or social disturbances in the class or invades the privacy of the pupils.

Yours truly,

Principal.
APPENDIX B
Letter of Parental Consent for Child's Participation in Research Project

September 12, 1995.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This letter requests your permission to allow your child to participate in a research project which will culminate in a doctoral thesis granted by the Ontario Institute of Education (O. I. S. E.), University of Toronto. The subject of the study, "A Qualitative Analysis of Social and Emotional Aspects Related to the Classroom Play of Junior Division Schoolchildren" has been approved by a committee of professors at O. I. S.E. This project also has the endorsement of ___________ Elementary School principal ________________. In this study, students will be interviewed and asked to write about some of the activities in which they choose to participate.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the final report, no actual names will be used in accordance with traditional research procedures.

If you allow your child to participate in this project, will you please kindly sign below.

Sincerely,

A. Silver

__________________________
(name of student)

__________________________
(parent's signature)
APPENDIX C

Interview With Fifth Grader

Q: What did you do for activities today?
A: I went to plasticine and made monsters and tombs and stuff for our drama play. It's called Death Valley. At least that's the name Kashif made it. We made some monsters that's hard to kill and there's going to be five levels and some of them are going to be fast and some are going to be a little long. Some of them are gross . . . Kashif is the good guy and I'm always the bad guy so when I throw my bombs . . . then when he gets blown up he loses a life span so he has to find pizza or food so he can gain his life back and there's also going to be bombs on the sides of the wall . . . when they fall they're going to blow up so he's going to lose one entire life. Then he has three continues [unintelligible] . . . and that's it.

Q: Where did you get all those ideas from?
A: Watching movies.

Q: What do you usually do when you have activities?
A: No answer.

Q: Well, what do you enjoy doing the most?
A: Drama.

Q: Why is that?
A: It's fun.

Q: At drama what are the kinds of things that you usually do?
A: We do plays. Some of them are about friendship maybe. I like to do adventures.

Q: Do you do those things outside of school too?
A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that activities are a good thing to do in school?
A: Yeah.
Q: Why is that?
A: It’s like free time. Instead of doing work . . . it’s time when you can enjoy yourself.
Q: Do you get anything out of it aside from having fun?
A: Yeah . . . like learning themes . . . like how to make stuff like plasticine monsters and stuff.
Q: Is it the kind of thing that should be done in school?
A: Sometimes.
Q: What do you mean? What makes it of any value?
A: [No answer.]
Q: When you told me that it’s enjoyable and that you learn things from it, what are some of those things?
A: Making things.
Q: When you do activities do you do them by yourself or with other people?
A: With other people mostly.
Q: Is there anything you’d like to add to what you’ve said?
A: No, that’s about it.
APPENDIX D

Two examples of documentary sources written by students

Today I did painting with Renn. First I started painting all sorts of things like flowers, circles, squares and things like that. When I filled up one whole paper I got another paper. Before I could paint anything this girl came and told em that I had to go to the library. After recess I started making a chirstmas tree with Farhana. First I took tuissupaper and cut out stripes. I glued the stripes on her chirstmas tree and got some buttons to glue on the chirstmas tree. When Farhana and I were finished we showed it to Mr. Silver. Farhana told Mr. Silver the chirstmas tree was for him and she put the chirstmas tree on his desk.

Today I was working on the lego with Narinder. We were making a car. We called it the happy shield car. It was made with wheels, a chair for the driver, a glass in front of the stearing wheel. There was two people. There was a peice of glass separating the two people. It has a sheild with a happy face on it. But I forgot to put a flag on it that had the number 1. It went very fast. It also had a powerful motor that kept it oging. I enjoyed doing the lego with Narinder. I think on my next activity I would have lots of fun.
Restem at string game - playing by himself
Arda - could not do junk today
- went to cut & paste
Neha, Hibaq, Danielle at sand:
Neha: Give me some water . . . looks good.
Hibaq: Someone come here! I'm just testing it.
Neha: Here, here, here. It's such a good idea!
H:
D: Oh - we're finished.
H: A little balcony. . . Now one of these. . . Can I test it first?
N: holding shovel while H. pours water - O.K. that's enough. Take off the left-over. We need more water.
D: Get some kleenex (H. goes to get paper towel)
N (to D): Make sure it's clean both.
N: Make the sides high.
D (to H): Could you get some paper towel? And pick up that and wipe it?
D: I told you not to put it up there.
N: It's breaking it's cracking.
D: It's fine now.
H: It's cracking you guys.
D: Water. I need water.
N: Well water or tap water? (Laughter)
N: Make it really equal.
D: That's enough water.
APPENDIX F

Journal Entry of September 22, 1995

Of all the things that I have seen this year with respect to play, the one thing that seems most prominent is the opportunity that it has given me to get close to two E.S.L. children. Alex is a very bright Spanish-speaking child from Equador. He has very little English, if any in fact, and he has only been in Canada for several weeks. By playing checkers with him the other day, I had an opportunity to get close to him and to help him with his acquisition of language in an informal session. Besides pointing out the colours black and white, I pointed out various other words such as forwards, backwards, jumping etc. Similarly, Alex helped me play Battleship against a student. As he pointed out the coordinates he wanted to guess, I helped teach him the numbers and alphabet. Mary is a very quiet, shy Somalian girl who wears Muslim dress. Although she tries to answer during French, her responses are so soft that I always have to ask her to repeat them. They are often just as low as her first answer. Rather than belabour the point I just go on to another student who might very well repeat the same answer. This situation is frustrating for me, the rest of the students, and probably worst of all for Mary. But as I played a game of Parcheesi with her the other day, I had an opportunity to get closer to her, to gain more insight into her capabilities and more than anything else, to gain her trust. I realized that she has a greater knowledge of English than I had originally thought. By being close to me physically in this informal situation without the fear of classmates, she spoke a little more loudly and a little more confidently. At the same time, I began to understand just what her abilities and limitations are.